

# IN THE HIGH HIMALAYAS

*SPORT AND TRAVEL IN THE RHOSTANG  
AND BARALACHA, WITH SOME NOTES ON  
THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THAT AREA*

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*WITH THIRTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE  
AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPHS*

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A WOMAN OF LADAKH, WEARING THE BERAK HEAD-DRESS  
AND SHEEPSKIN CLOAK

*Frontispiece*

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*Manufactured in Great Britain*

## INTRODUCTION

IT has been my good fortune on several occasions to visit the interesting provinces of Kulu, Lahul and Spiti, which lie grouped about the great ranges of the Rhotang and Baralacha in the Western Himalayas. The three provinces are grouped together for administrative purposes in the subdivision of Kulu, which is attached to the Kangra district of the Punjab. But this grouping is purely artificial, for the three countries are all very different and have little in common save certain of their boundaries. Kulu may be considered as typically Himalayan in character ; Spiti is, strictly speaking, merely a portion of Tibet which has been carved off from that country, and serves as a buffer State between it and British territory ; while Lahul differs from both Spiti and Kulu in certain salient characteristics, but serves in a manner as a connecting link between them. Kulu is fairly well known to the English in India, even if only by repute, as the source of some of the best fruit obtainable in India, though comparatively few ever visit it ; but Lahul and Spiti are little heard of and very seldom visited, Spiti in particular being almost unknown ; the latter country in fact may be regarded as one of the least accessible and least known portions of our Indian Empire, and this peculiar position is recognised in the preamble of various Acts and Laws which expressly exempt from their provisions the pergunnah of Spiti.

In the pages that follow I have endeavoured to portray some of the more interesting characteristics of Lahul and Spiti and of the portions of Kulu that

## INTRODUCTION

border on them ; to this end I have avoided any appearance of writing in diary form, or of treating my various trips in separate order, but my aim has been to select and combine in loosely homogeneous form a series of pictures to indicate the varied interests of travel in the High Himalayas. My aim has not been to write for the specialist or the serious student—for such an aim indeed I claim no competence—but my hope has been twofold : to present some idea of these countries to those who never hope to visit them in person but still are anxious to learn of fields beyond their immediate horizon ; and to provide something of a finger-post to those who have an expectation of following in my tracks and would learn a little of the scenes and interests that lie before them.

The illustrations have all been reproduced from my own photographs, which were taken with a No. 3 Folding Pocket Kodak, fitted with the ordinary standard lens.

The rifle used in all the chapters dealing with big game was a .351 Winchester repeater of the 1907 automatic model, carrying a magazine of five cartridges. I have never entered into the endless controversy that rages on the subject of rifles and the best makes and types for various kinds of game ; chance brought the above-named rifle into my possession on my first arrival in India, and it proved so satisfactory for the different species of big game which I had an opportunity of hunting that I have never felt the need of any other weapon. For some conditions of shooting and for the largest animals this rifle is of course unsuitable, but my chief objection to it is the large number of shots that may be fired in the smallest space of time. For after much experience I have come round to the opinion that a sportsman should be satisfied with a double-barrelled gun or rifle ; if two cartridges cannot do his work, it is better left

undone, and the ability to fire five or six shots without reloading in inexperienced or greedy hands leads to a great deal of indiscriminate shooting and the most undesirable results.

I am under many obligations to Thakur Mangal Chand and Thakur Abhai Chand of the ruling family of Kolong, whose assistance largely enabled me to make the more difficult of the journeys described in these pages. Their influence saved me from many of the worries and difficulties that tend to spoil the pleasure of travel off the beaten track ; and on more than one occasion they travelled with me, and by their company added to the pleasures of the road. I record this tribute to their kindness in the hope that it may recall to them pleasant memories amidst the hardships that we shared together.

My thanks also are due to Mr J. W. W. Fairlie of the Punjab Civil Service, who, during his tenure of the post of Subdivisional Officer of Kulu, rendered me much assistance in my travels.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to the various authors of the official *Gazetteer* of the Kangra district, compiled and published under the orders of the Punjab Government.

H. W.



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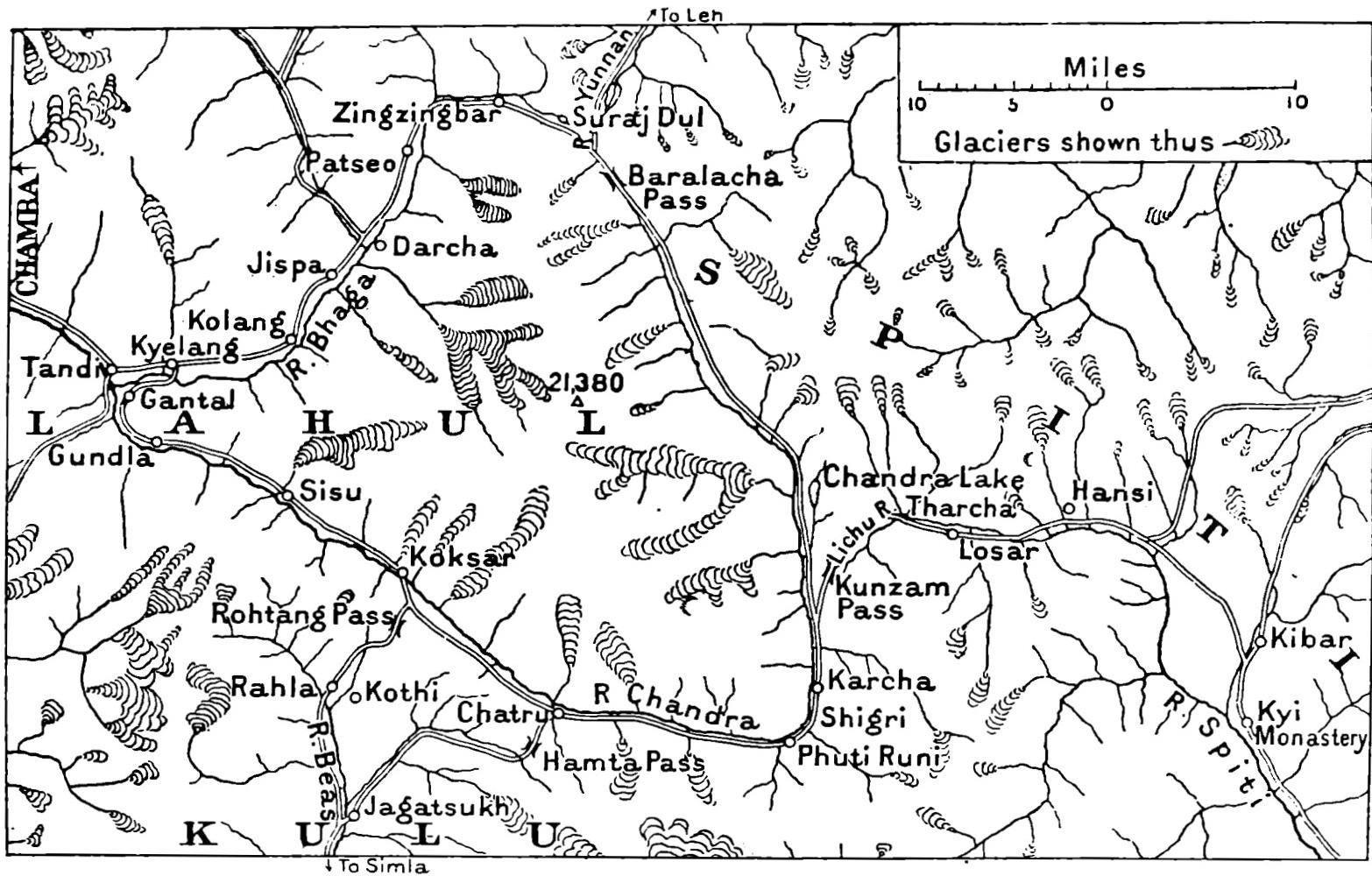
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Map to Illustrate THE PROVINCES OF LAHUL AND SPITI.



# IN THE HIGH HIMALAYAS

## CHAPTER I

### THE RHOTANG PASS

THE Rhotang Pass is one of the more important and better known of the West Himalayan Passes, owing to the fact that it carries the trade route from India to Leh-Ladakh and Turkestan. The beginning of the route is well known to all who have lived in Simla under the name of the Hindustan-Tibet road, which, in its earlier stages about Fagoo and Narkanda, is a favourite scene for picnics and short tours. Beyond Narkanda, however, the road divides ; one branch runs through Koteghar and Po over the Shipki Pass into Tibet proper ; the other branch has a longer course in British territory. It crosses the beautiful Jalouri Pass into Inner Saraj, runs thence up the Kulu Valley along the River Beas to its source on the Rhotang range, along the Chandra and Bhaga valleys to the Baralacha Pass, and after traversing the Lingti Plain enters Kashmir territory by the Tsarab bridge. This road is managed by the Public Works Department ; while not yet adapted for wheeled traffic it is well kept and suitable for laden mules and riding animals as far as Patseo in Northern Lahul, and staging bungalows of various types are maintained along the road for the convenience of officials and travellers. The road is open to traffic throughout the year as far as Manali ; beyond that the traveller is dependent on the state of the Rhotang Pass.

The Rhotang range, which forms the southern boundary of Lahul, has a very high mean altitude ; the highest peaks rise somewhat over 20,000 feet ; the lowest gap in the chain is the Rhotang Pass, and that carries the road at an altitude of 13,000 feet. Glaciers and perpetual snow clothe the upper portion of the whole range except in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pass, and this is seldom clear of snow. From December until March the road is entirely closed by the snow, which extends down to the valleys. Conditions differ according to the severity of the winter, but for a month or two before and after the actual closing of the Pass it can be crossed only by the stoutest of mountaineers, unburdened with packs. The mail route to Kyelang is closed during the winter, and the dak runners cross to and from only after the Assistant Commissioner in Kulu has officially declared the Pass open.

It is about May that the Pass may really be said to open, but the traveller desirous of entering Lahul must make full inquiries at Manali of the state of the snow. Early in the season it is difficult to ascertain the amount of snow still left on the road : reports are conflicting and often untrue, owing to the unwillingness of mule-men and coolies to cross into Lahul before the summer traffic is at its height. It is usually quite impossible to learn anything definite so far south as Sultanpur, which would be the natural base for arranging transport.

For this reason it is wise to arrange a halt at Manali to allow time for inquiries as to the state of the road and to make arrangements if coolies are required to replace the mules that the traveller has brought from the plains. From Manali there is one short stage to the foot of the Pass, six or eight miles according to whether a halt is arranged at Kothi or Rahla. Rahla is the more convenient halting-place, as it is quite at the foot of the Pass and

the ascent starts from the door of the rest-house, so that men and animals are fresh for the difficult climb. But there is some difficulty about supplies at Rahla, and pressure is gradually being applied to make travellers halt at the more convenient and commodious Forest rest-house of Kothi, two miles below the Pass.

Kothi bungalow is situated on a grassy slope at the lower edge of the immense forests of pine and chestnut, which are the haunt of both red and black bears ; no more pleasant spot could be imagined for a few days' rest if time is no object. The views are magnificent ; opposite the bungalow are the pine-girt precipices which line the southern foot of the Rhotang range, while south of them stretches an inimitable vista of the valleys, the wide forests and the snow-touched ranges that make up northern Kulu. Just below the bungalow is one of the natural wonders of Kulu. The floor of the valley is rent by a mighty crack, as it were the result of some upheaval of nature. The chasm, 20 feet wide, is lined by sheer cliffs, and at their base, 100 feet below, the Beas races and surges with an unceasing roar, swift with all the momentum of its fall from the summit of the Rhotang. It enters the chasm—the subterranean passage almost we may call it—hardly more than a mountain stream. Three thousand yards below it emerges, and joined by the Solang torrent has become a river. The road is carried over the chasm by a narrow wooden bridge, and the wonder and the roar of the tumbling waters are set off by the shrill, eerie song of the whistling thrush as he flits unconcerned from ledge to crag. Blue rock pigeons nest in the cliffs, and the grassy slopes are cheerful with the pleasant call of the choughs, whose presence here is one of the first intimations to the traveller that he is approaching the Alpine pastures.

From Kothi to Rahla the road is good and the rise

but gentle. Then from Rahla the Pass commences, and the next halting-place is Koksar in Lahul.

The commencement of the climb from Rahla is in some respects the most strenuous part of the stage ; the road climbs in a series of everlasting zigzags backwards and forwards up the side of an enormous rounded buttress of the range, and until the summit of this is reached the Pass proper is hidden from view. The road here, and indeed all the way to Koksar, is rough and narrow, but, providing the snow allows, is suitable for mules and hill ponies. An endeavour is made by the Public Works Department to keep it in reasonable order, but the disintegrating influences of melting snow and rain and the passage of innumerable sheep cut it up greatly, and I have heard an indignant climber compare its surface to the bed of a stream.

There is a short cut from Rahla bungalow straight up the side of the hill to join the road before it reaches the top of the hump ; it is marked by rough stones here and there arranged to form steps, but he who essays it must be stout in wind and limb. It is remarkable for some sacred snakes, which live under a flat stone by the side of the path, and receive offerings from passers-by. It is said that they come out to be fed with rice and milk, but on the only occasion that I visited the stone a cold wind and a clouded sky had made them withdraw amongst the rocks, and a few offerings of pice and flowers were all that distinguished the stone.

The religion of Kulu is very largely bound up with the Nags, or aboriginal snake-gods, the spirits of the rivers and mountains. In this particular instance my orderly explained that the Nags had originally lived down in the valley, but that, incensed by the behaviour of the villagers, they had withdrawn to this distant spot, so as to give the trouble and penance of pilgrimage to their devotees. "But, Beli Ram,"

said I, " what do the snakes do with pice ? " " Oh, other travellers carry them off," was the answer, with that engaging frankness that exists side by side with the most credulous faith.

Plodding up the steep road one finds just excuse for many a halt in the scenery. To the left stupendous precipices rise above Rahla, wreathed in pines, and cut by many a gorge, and across their face the lammergeier weaves his unending shuttle. Behind the Kulu ranges stretch below in diversity of forest and valley, hazy in the distance and narrowing into clearness in the virgin forest about Kothi. To the right the steep gorges that mark the passage of the infant Beas separate the hump from a bare ridge, where drifts of snow linger in the sun, and up whose bare scree straggle the last outposts of the green birch forest that marks the end of tree limit. The hump on which we climb is bare of trees save for a few straggling pines that cling about a small precipice to the right.

On reaching the miniature downs that crown the hump the first glimpse is caught of the summit of the Pass, still some miles ahead. Here the steepness of the road diminishes, but in exchange there is the strong wind from the Beas gorge, which is a well-known feature of the Pass. It varies in intensity, but I have known it strong enough to make me feel unsafe on horseback, and dismount.

There is usually a good deal of traffic on the road, and from here onwards one may find the tiny camps of traders whose ponies are not strong enough to cross in one march, or shepherds whose flocks are grazing on the pastures around.

The most picturesque caravans are undoubtedly the small ones of the Tibetan and Ladakhi nomads ; three or four rough ponies come along the road picking their way gingerly amongst the loose stones, half led, half driven by their dirty owners, whose flat

Mongolian faces and greasy pigtails proclaim their race. Men and women alike wear long loose gowns with wide sleeves, girt in at the waist, and usually a deep plum-red in colour, or blue—originally ; long cloth boots, with soles of raw hide, protect their feet from the stones, and the vestiges of fur-lined caps protect the heads of the men. The women have their heads bare, but the high cheek-bones are usually disfigured with a plaster of some black substance. The Lahulas told me that this was done to distract the eyes of the gods from their beauty—for those that the gods love die young!—but to my sophisticated eye it usually appeared that the women had nothing to fear on that score, for the round cheery flat faces are apt to be hideous in the extreme. But to every Jill her Jack, and every face is beautiful to some eye, no doubt. Beneath the usage and superstition I suspect some practical application to the prevention of glare and snow-blindness. The shaggy ponies are laden with the primitive tents of these folk, with their humble supplies, and with articles for barter. They are harmless creatures, who beg and barter and wander their way through life.

Other caravans are composed of Lahulas coming south with wool to barter in Kulu, or of the Hindu traders from Hoshiarpur, who go up to Leh with stocks of tea and cloth and sugar and the hundred-and-one articles that are the mainstay of the bazaars of the East. The Lahulas are typical rosy-cheeked mountaineers in good brown homespun, practical to a degree ; while the Hindu muleteers straggle along the road with the unpractical dirty white garments of their kind, bare shins exposed to the biting winds, and blankets huddled round their necks.

But the mass of the traffic is composed of the flocks of sheep and goats which surge to and fro like a mighty tide in the Himalayas, flowing in June and ebbing in September ; they move in sympathy with

the snows, as the vast Alpine pastures emerge from the snow and provide some of the finest grazing in the world—an illustration and perhaps an explanation to the thoughtful observer of the migration of the birds.

Now and again one meets strings of Baltis hurrying along with shovels and picks strapped on to the pack which each man carries on his back. These men work as labourers in the Simla hills during the winter, and rush for a brief summer visit to their homes in the uplands of Kashmir.

Once I met an unfortunate Hindu Sadhu on the Pass who mumbled sadly to me of the cold and the horror of the snow ; and well he might, for his thin saffron robe and clogs were more suited to the hot bazaars of Delhi and Lahore than to the road to Triloknath.

On a fine day the road from here onwards to the summit of the Pass is very pleasant ; it winds through the lush green pastures studded with clumps of dwarf iris and starred with anemones and bright potentillas. Flocks of choughs feed about the hill-sides, taking occasionally to wing with a medley of cheerful calls, and sailing gracefully past ; while as we round a corner a party of snow pigeons rise with a clatter of wings from the grain spilt on the road from some damaged pack—clean-looking fellows these, with their grey and fawn and white, and their sharply defined black heads. The pleasant song of the ruby-throat rises from some litter of boulders that time and the melting snows have brought down from the heights above.

But the road can be very different. I have hurried down it in a wet driving mist that chilled me to the bone and hid everything save the immediate neighbourhood.

In any case, the Pass must be treated with respect. The high altitude and the long climb find out many a

hidden weakness in the traveller, so that it is wise to ride a pony for the first ascent ; while a serious chill may easily be contracted from the cold winds when the body is heated with the climb. A little neglect and the whole tour may be spoilt for want of simple precautions.

Less than a mile from the summit the road crosses a very deeply cut ravine, bordered on one side by a precipice ; this precipice may be scanned for the first glimpse of the blue Alpine poppy which grows on the ledges. The flower is a typical poppy in shape and of a most delightful shade of blue ; but it withers at once when picked, and the stem is covered with long thorns, which render it unpleasant to handle. The flower is best admired and left to bloom in its solitude.

This ravine is filled until late in the summer with a long frozen drift of snow, which is difficult and at times dangerous to pass with pack animals. It is indeed one of the main obstacles to the Pass, and on its condition largely depends the date when baggage trains can commence to cross the Rhotang. From this point onwards the road is rendered unpleasant by drifts of snow which lie about the slopes, and increase as the summit is reached.

The actual Pass is a broad saddle-backed gap in the range, dominated by a steep cone on the western side, but rising more gradually to the east ; low bars of rock hardly worthy of the name of cliffs buttress up the saddle-back, which in the centre is hollowed out into a chain of pools when the snow has melted. At each side of the gap, about a quarter of a mile apart, are two stone huts erected by Government for the aid of travellers caught in the storms that sweep across the Pass. A debris of stone and shale litters the ground everywhere.

The ground round the first of the huts is remarkable for the number of pointed stones which have been stuck up on the ground endwise by travellers,



(Upper) A REFUGE HUT ON THE RHO TANG PASS, 13,000 FEET

(Lower) PEOPLE OF LAHUL



in some obscure tribute to the spirit of the Pass and the deity of the River Beas, which has its source below a rock behind the hut. On my first ascent of the Rhotang the base of the rock was all buried in snow, but later visits revealed a small Baulé, or spring-head, with rough stone figures of gods, which enclosed the actual source of the river. This does not appear to be a spring, but merely a trickle of melting snow, which soon meanders over the edge of the gap and, fed by other similar trickles, becomes a mountain stream.

On a clear day the view into Lahul from the Rhotang Pass can hardly be surpassed. The northern slope of the range falls away so steeply that the Chandra river at its foot is invisible, but the eye looks straight across the immense valley at the central mass of the mountains of Lahul, which have the appearance of a frozen sea. Snow-capped peaks rise in mighty waves, and glaciers fill the troughs about their feet.

A strong wind usually blows across the Pass, and on a bad day the scudding mist and rain and the icy cold can make it an exceedingly unpleasant place.

Once crossing the Pass in July, when there was still a good deal of late snow about, we were caught by a bad storm of rain. This turned the snow into such a morass that my baggage mules could get along only with extreme difficulty, struggling and falling in the sodden snow, helped up again and again by the men. The situation was so bad that coolies had to be summoned up from the Koksar stage to assist the mules, lightening the loads of some and entirely unloading others, and with their assistance we finally reached Koksar. But one mule was so exhausted with his struggles in the snow that he fell and died by the roadside, and his owner reached Koksar in such a plight that I was afraid he, too, might follow suit. He was a Hindu who had served with a

mountain battery in the war, and their gunners are chosen for their strength and physique. A strong, hot dose of brandy and water soon pulled him round, but his spirit was chiefly revived by a promise that I would recompense him for the loss of the mule. This matter was at last settled by a Panchiyat of the various members of the camp and the young Thakur of Lahul, who finally estimated that the man would be handsomely treated if I paid him a hundred rupees. Apparently the Panchiyat pointed out with much emphasis that the mule was by no means a new one, that it had already paid a handsome profit to its owner, and that there had been considerable depreciation in its value since purchase ! However, the muleteer seemed satisfied with the award, and the early payment of the sum agreed on encouraged him to announce that he was willing in future to cross any pass in Asia with me. So all's well that ends well.

The northern face of the Pass differs from the Kulu side in its comparative steepness, but the road here is generally in better condition, and it twists and turns at easy gradients, so that the passage is monotonous and lengthy rather than difficult, and, once the valley is reached, only an easy mile or two remain to the Koksar rest-house.

## CHAPTER II

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LAHUL

IT is not difficult to grasp the salient features of the province of Lahul, provided that one studies the country in the terms of its watersheds which regulate and explain the mountain ranges. Thus treated, the whole province falls into two well-defined areas—the main block, which lies between the Central and Inner Himalayan chains, and a smaller north-eastern projection, which lies to the north of the Inner Himalayas, and in many ways, politically and physically, has more connection with Ladakh than with Lahul proper.

The main area of Lahul may be regarded as triangular in shape, and it is based on the Chandra and Bhaga rivers, which in every way form the framework and support of the country. The course of these two rivers is peculiar and probably without many parallels. Both rivers rise at an altitude of about 16,000 feet on the Baralacha or Baralatse range, which is one of the sections of the Inner Himalayas. Their sources are very close—indeed not more than a mile apart—but with the very wide and essential difference that they lie on separate slopes of the range ; yet after a separate course, totalling some hundred miles and more, the two rivers come together again and, ultimately uniting, become the Chenab, one of the five rivers of the Punjab.

The Chandra river rises on the south-eastern side of the Baralacha Pass, owing its origin to the snow-beds that melt daily under the influence of the sun and send down trickles of water that virtually cease at night and wax and wane by day with the strength

of the sun's rays. Within less than a mile it has become a considerable stream and is quite unfordable, while the rocky bed, the icy temperature of the water and the swiftness of the current deter the boldest swimmer. The course follows a general south-easterly line for some thirty miles, and then the river, now augmented by innumerable side streams, sweeps round to the west, and again to the north-west, and after another forty miles reaches Tandi, where it unites with the Bhaga river.

The Bhaga river rises in the Suraj Dal, or Lake of the Sun, a name given to the small but deep tarn situated well on the summit of the Baralacha Pass, a little below an altitude of 16,000 feet. It flows north-west for a few miles, and then between Zing-zingbar and Patseo turns south-west, almost with a right angle, and flows thence with a general westerly curve to Tandi, its separate course lasting about forty miles.

From Tandi the two rivers united, and known as the Chandra-Bhaga, flow a further sixteen miles, till they pass into the independent state of Chamba, whence in due course they emerge as the Chenab river, breaking its way through the outer ranges into the plains. The Chenab flows into the Jhelam river in the Jhang district of the Punjab and, joining the Indus near Dera Ghazi Khan, eventually reaches the sea at Karachi.

The watersheds of these two rivers then are Lahul proper, the triangle formed by their separate courses producing the main central core on to which we looked from the summit of the Baralacha Pass.

The smaller north-easterly projection, which forms the remaining portion of Lahul, is about a hundred square miles in area, and is known as the Lingti Plain ; it similarly is the watershed of a river, the Yunnan, though here political boundaries have not fitted in so well with those of nature. The Yunnan

river rises on the northern face of the Baralacha Pass, within less than a mile of the sources of the Chandra and Bhaga, and flows in a north-easterly direction till it meets the Tsarab river, and so through Zanskar into the Indus. All roads lead to Rome and all streams on the Baralacha flow to Karachi !

Freed of detail the mountain ranges of Lahul are similarly easy to understand. The triangular core of the province is composed of two main ranges, of which the longer has its axis running north and south, while the shorter projects roughly at right angles on the western side ; lateral spurs and peaks fringe these two ranges thickly, so that their main outline is obscured, and the blocking of the heads of all the valleys with glaciers further conceals their shape ; but together they form the triangle, round the sides of which flow the Chandra and the Bhaga rivers. This triangle of mountains is situated between the two parallel ranges of the Baralacha and Rhotang (described above as the Inner and Central Himalayas), which run as if ruled with a pair of parallels from north-west to south-east. The space between the two main ranges on both sides of Lahul is filled in with a mass of mountains which can only be considered as spurs of the Baralacha, though the Kunzum range, which divides Lahul from Spiti, is more clearly defined as a connecting range between the two parallels that hold the triangle. On all sides the triangular core of Lahul is sharply defined and cut off from the surrounding mountains, save at the extreme northern point, where a high and narrow neck, five miles long, connects it with the Inner Himalayas ; and this neck forms the Baralacha Pass, 16,000 feet, which is said to give its name to the range. Baralacha is apparently a corruption of the Tibetan "Pára-lartsé," the Pass of the Cross Roads, a reference to the fact that the roads from Zangskar, Ladakh, Spiti and Lahul all meet on the summit.

It is important to understand the main artery of Lahul, the trade road from Simla to Leh. We have already seen how this road climbs up from Simla and crosses the Rhotang range and dips into the valley of the Chandra at Koksar. Once in the valley it keeps strictly to the course of the rivers, running down the Chandra to Tandi and then up the Bhaga to its source on the Baralacha ; it then crosses the Pass and runs down the Yunnan river across the Lingti Plain, till by the Tsarab bridge it enters Ladakh, and so on into the heart of Asia. This is the course that trade and invasion have travelled for centuries, dependent on the natural features of the land. All that the British Government has done, through the agency of the Public Works Department, is to maintain the road in such condition that travellers may pass with the minimum of discomfort. The road has accordingly been widened out and rendered fit for mule caravans by the improving of the gradients, the building up of low retaining walls, and by the provision of bridges over the Chandra and Bhaga and the side torrents that fall into them. Staging bungalows and small serais are maintained at Koksar, Sissoo, Gondla, Kyelang, Jispar and Patseo, and there are small serais at Zingzingbar and Sarchu. The road is maintained properly as far as the Tsarab bridge, and, provided that the snow on the passes has melted, it is usually possible to take baggage mules and ponies right up to the boundary. But in actual practice the traveller who would go beyond Kyelang is wise to change his mules for Lahuli ponies or coolies. There is usually no difficulty for the two stages beyond Kyelang to Jispar and Patseo, but after Patseo the minimum altitude of the road is 14,000 feet, and the scanty grass that grows at this height is seldom sufficient for the needs of the caravan.

Several factors have determined the course of the road : the straighter route, along the Upper Chandra

Valley, involves the crossing of the great Shigri glacier and the passage of much difficult and uninhabited country ; while Tandi, at the junction of the rivers, is roughly the centre of the most fertile and closely inhabited tracts of Lahul.

The total area of Lahul is given as 1764 square miles : at the last revision of the Settlement, in 1912, official records show that about .5 per cent. of this area alone was under cultivation, representing about 2900 acres of arable land and 3300 acres of meadow-land. The population was estimated in the corresponding census of 1911 as under 8000 souls, but it is never possible to form a very accurate estimate of the population of Lahul, as, on account of the strenuous conditions of life in this wild mountain tract, large numbers of the inhabitants are away at every time of year, trading or labouring in the neighbouring countries.

The mass of the cultivation, and consequently of the population, is grouped in the fertile valley of the Chandra-Bhaga, which is known as Pattan. This is the lowest and the warmest portion of Lahul, for the minimum altitude of 9000 feet is reached at the spot where the Chandra-Bhaga enters Chamba. From Pattan the villages spread up both valleys, but as the floor of the valleys rise, the cultivation steadily dwindles until its limit is reached just above Koksar in the Chandra Valley and Darcha in the valley of the Bhaga. Along the sides of the valleys the villages never appear to reach an altitude higher than 11,000 feet. It will be seen, therefore, that the greater part of Lahul is uninhabited—namely, all the mountain-sides above an altitude of 11,000 feet, and the whole area of the Lingti Plain, the Baralacha and the Upper Chandra Valley.

After the long and strenuous passage of the Rhotang the traveller invariably halts at Koksar for the night. The rest-house is a small two-roomed bungalow

situated on the high bank of the Chandra, just by the Koksar bridge. Each room has a bathroom and tiny verandah attached, so that two sets of travellers can be accommodated, and the whole is roughly but sufficiently furnished. Behind is a row of outhouses, containing a kitchen and small rooms for servants, and behind this again is a larger serai built for the accommodation of mules and the poorer wayfarers. Supplies in moderation can be obtained here from a contractor, provided that intimation of arrival has been sent ahead. The contractor has provided a sort of habitation for himself by building a rough stone wall in front of a hollow under one of the huge boulders, weighing many tons, which lie strewn beside the rest-house as the advance guard of the mass of debris that is slowly pouring down the steep hill-side. The village of Koksar lies across the river, and the rest-house and its offices are alone save for the camping-ground. Here, during the summer months, is usually an assortment of the tiny tents of the Kampas, the Central Asiatic equivalent of our Western gipsies. Their tents are very small—of coarse striped home-spun cloth stretched over a couple of poles, prayer-flags and wisps of hair hanging from the projecting ends. A glance inside usually reveals a sort of wall built up at the farther end, composed of packs and bundles, performing the double purpose of a shelter from the wind and an altar for gods and reliquaries. The men are mostly absent during the day about their affairs, but a varied assortment of women and children, all of marked Mongolian features, eye the intruder, and end by begging from him. They are harmless enough folk, but the wise man keeps a wary eye on the rough Tibetan dogs that lie about the tents, and are often tied up to the poles.

Below the rest-house the road is carried over the Chandra by one of the curious cantilever bridges which are a feature of Kulu and Lahul. On each side

of the river a strong buttress of stones is built up ; these stones are merely fitted together, depending on their mutual weight for solidity, without the use of lime and mortar. From the water-face of the buttress stout beams project, each composed of a roughly cleaned section of a tree trunk ; these beams are placed in pairs, with an upward slant, each pair above the other and each pair longer than the one below it. The number of such beams varies according to the size of the required bridge, but three or four pairs are the usual number. Their inner ends are held securely by the weight of the stone buttress, the outer ends are bound together. Care is taken to erect the beams on each side of the river so that the longest and uppermost pairs face each other on a level with the top of the buttress ; long beams are then laid from the buttress tops to the projecting cantilevers and across the central gap, and the river is bridged. A rough track of planks is laid across, and if labour and wood are sufficient, hand-rails are added. A glance at the photo of the Darcha bridge will explain the principle of these bridges more clearly than any written description.

During the winter, when traffic is suspended and the river lies hidden under a sheet of snow and ice, the wooden roadway and rails are removed and carefully stored away, lest they should come to harm. Wood is a valuable commodity in this treeless land, and much of the timber has to be brought over the Rhotang Pass. For a long time two huge pine trunks required for one of these bridges were lying stranded near the summit of the Pass. The labour and effort required to drag them over must have been immense.

Across the river the village of Koksar stands on a plateau of arable land left by a bend in the course of the river. Seen from a distance the houses are not remarkable in themselves, for they are of the mud-walled, flat-roofed type common to the East generally ;

but the peculiarity of this and some other villages in Lahul lies in the fact that the houses are all built together, practically in one solid block, so that in winter the inhabitants can move from house to house under cover without going into the snow.

At Koksar I made my first acquaintance with a lama, and was not a little embarrassed by the meeting and my ignorance of how to treat a dignitary of the Church. On being told that he had arrived to see me, I went out and found a worthy old gentleman in red robes twirling a prayer-wheel. Linguistic difficulties completed my embarrassment, but, luckily, the lama had apparently only called out of curiosity and with no set purpose. So as a desire to be polite is easily manifested without any great recourse to language, we both soon satisfied our curiosity and parted with a satisfactory opinion of each other. I eventually went to see his little temple, which is built in a most remarkable situation behind Koksar. Here the side of the valley is bounded by an immense precipice, and the temple nestles in a little hollow under its base on the top of a steep slope. The hollow is deep enough for the face of the precipice to overhang the building and shelter it from rain and snow, and the general effect is most delightful, recalling some elfin building in a fairy story.

The building itself was a quaint, flat-roofed structure of several stories of irregular design ; the lower rooms were used indifferently as byres and barns ; numerous unkempt heads peering out of the windows indicated that the middle stories were living-rooms for the lama's family and servants ; while the upper story, into which I climbed, was the temple proper. We need not linger here, however, as the temple was a poor and incredibly dirty specimen, and hardly typical of its kind.

Koksar stage is one of the least inviting in Lahul and suffers from contrast. The traveller, after many

stages up the lovely Kulu Valley, arrives late in the day, tired with the passage of the Rhotang, to find himself in the bleakest and coldest of surroundings. Cold shadows descend on the rest-house early in the evening, an icy wind blows down the valley, the bungalow is cold and draughty, and supplies are difficult to obtain. The prospect down the road gives little hint of the pleasant stages ahead. Small wonder is it that many travellers turn back at once, determined to spend their time and money amidst the luxuriant forests of Kulu.

The stage from Koksar to Sissoo is a short one of only nine miles. The road at first runs along the side of the river, but after a while it climbs on to the plateau that represents the original bed of the valley, and then an opportunity is afforded to estimate the true character of the land.

To those who only know the Himalayas in their outer ranges, clothed with luxuriant forests, Lahul comes as a revelation. It is a land of stone and boulder, of precipice and mountain torrent. Down the centre of the valley runs the river, narrow, and of no great depth, but foaming and surging with a ceaseless roar, which merely serves to emphasise the brooding silence of the land.

For a space the water runs in a narrow channel, where strata of rock have circumscribed its opportunities; then for several hundred yards it curves through wide beds of sand and shingle, and yet again it passes along the foot of steep slopes of shale, slowly eating its way and changing its course with the passage of years. The unceasing nature of its activities is emphasised by the meanderings of the road, which wanders up and down at the different levels that record past changes in the floor of the valley.

The valley is narrow, and from it the mountains rise very abruptly, here softened in contour by steep

rolling downs, there falling sharply in precipices almost to the water's edge ; but rolling down and dizzy precipice alike culminate in the lofty peaks, with their mantles of eternal snow. Round the peaks lie the glaciers ; some lie in the great ravines that scar the summits of the ranges, filling them and flowing in one frozen mass down towards the valley ; others cling to hollows in the peaks : for these there is no slow onward march, but as they press forward to the spot where slope gives place to sheer drop they crack and break, leaving a clear-cut icy face to overhang the valley.

On a sunny day the avalanches are incessant. A dull roar fills the valley and, looking up, one sees a cataract of snow falling over some cliff on to the snow-beds below. But distance dwarfs the stage, and it is difficult to realise the tons of snow and the force with which they fall to cause the noise that echoes through the valley. As a rule these avalanches do no damage, as their scene is too remote from the haunts of men, but they are responsible for closing much of the country to settlement. Many ibex and snow leopards are killed in them, and I have heard this cited as a reason why the ibex heads of Lahul do not obtain the fine dimensions of those of Baltistan and the Thianshan. This theory does not, however, appear correct, and the difference is probably merely sub-specific—that is to say, the ibex of Lahul grow shorter heads because of differences in their food-supply and habitat.

The severe and oppressive grandeur of the country lacks the softening influence of vegetation. Grass-land and pasturage there are in plenty, far beyond the capacity of the villages to use them ; but their luxuriance is dwarfed by the bare scree and the boulder-strewn slopes, which tell of the ceaseless disintegration of the peaks under the influence of wind and sun and snow. Round the villages below Koksar are small

groves of pollard willow, with here and there a few poplars. On the northern slopes grow straggling patches of birch and rhododendron, and here and there stretches of hill-side are covered with blue pines. Yet even the birch, that last outpost of mountain tree-growth, ceases at about 12,000 feet. Amidst the immensity of the wastes of rock and stone and snow these patches of vegetation cease to count, and merely serve to emphasise the essential bareness of the land. Thus it is that travellers return and speak of Lahul as a treeless country.

The march down the valley can be very pleasant. The air and wind are cold, and warm clothing is essential, but the sun shines strongly down on to the rocks and at times oppresses one with the heat and glare, albeit the air is bracing. Between Koksar and Sissoo the chief point of interest is a grassy plain, less than a mile square, studded with heaps of stones that mark the sites of ancient graves. The valley here is dominated by the well-known peak of Gyephang (19,200 feet), which is visible as far away as Simla, and this explains the tradition that a Lahula General, named Gyephang, was responsible for the massacre of the invading Tartar force that lies beneath the mounds. For the Tartars were killed in a snowstorm that came from Gyephang peak, and the peak is the local habitation of the Nature god, Gyephang, who is brother to Jamla Deota, who lives in the remote Malana nullah of Kulu. Devi Prini of Juggatsukh, also in Kulu, is the sister of these gods, and the whole family and their worship are clearly Tibetan in origin, and pre-Buddhist.

At Sissoo there is a most pleasant little rest-house set on a high plateau above the river-bed and surrounded by the first of the willow-trees of the country. The willows are met with only in the vicinity of cultivation, and it appears probable that they have been introduced into the country. Long willow poles are

cut and planted in groups of three, tied together, along the sides of irrigation channels. They are cut back very persistently as growth is obtained, and the green branches are used for fodder. At the foot of the plateau, on which stands the bungalow, is a small tank of water, apparently natural in origin, and this is one of the few places in the country where small parties of duck rest on migration. There are also said to be some fish in the water fit for eating, but they are very small and negligible from the point of view of the angler.

Across the Chandra river, opposite Sissoo, there is quite the finest waterfall that I have ever seen. The water pours over a cliff from a high valley between two mountains, and the long stream of water wreathed with the spray that rises from its base is a very wonderful sight. Seen even from the distance of a mile a good idea is obtained of the volume of water that pours forth.

At Sissoo I saw a yak for the first time. It was feeding on the grass-land down by the river, and the people told me that it was the only yak in the country, being a stallion kept for the local cows. The hybrid between the yak and the ordinary cow is known in Lahul as a "Choru," and is greatly esteemed for use with the plough. The choru is stronger than a hill bullock and is able to flourish in the Lahul valleys, which are too hot and to some extent too low for the yak, which cannot approach low altitudes without danger.

Just beyond the Sissoo rest-house the road dips down into a deeply cut nullah, in the rocky sides of which rest numbers of snow pigeons and blue rocks. In that portion of Sissoo village beyond the bridge there are a couple of ancient carved stones, which clearly at one time formed part of a spring-head, though they now lie some distance apart. Carved stones of this type are very rare in Lahul, and it would be of interest to investigate their origin.

Beyond Sissoo the valley opens out for a space and becomes less rugged and barren in character. The hill-sides about the road are not so steep, but recall the Scottish moors in their rolling contours, while the pasture-lands and cultivation are studded with briar bushes; the pasture itself is more luxuriant and is bright with wild flowers, so that one is reminded of the rich English pasture-lands in contrast to the slopes of coarse hard grass of the Outer Himalayas.

Here and there are patches of marshy ground, formed by runnels of water finding their way from the snows to the valley, and these are covered with luxuriant patches of the marsh marigold. It is interesting to note that these bogs are the breeding-ground of the lovely Hodgson's wagtail, a brilliant black and yellow bird, whose yellow head is the exact colour of the flowers of the marigold, and blends in with them as the bird feeds and sits in the neighbourhood of the nest.

Here, too, along the valley breeds the Himalayan skylark, and the song of the males as they soar over the fields and pastures brings further memories of the English countryside.

From Sissoo it is about seven miles to the next stage at Gondla. The rest-house here is set on the edge of wide terraced fields below a wide grove of willows, which give a very green and sheltered appearance to the little village. One evening I was returning to the house from a tramp on the hill-side, and as I swung down the road along the lines of willows my eye caught sight of a chukor partridge squatting in one of the pollarded heads. Seeing that she was observed, the bird flew off down the hill-side, and on climbing the tree I found a nest with twelve eggs laid in the head of the willow, some ten feet from the ground. The chukor is of course very common in Lahul, and it breeds normally amongst

bushes and under stones on the hill-side, like all other red-legged partridges ; and it was curious to find this parallel to the cases sometimes reported in English newspapers of the discovery of red-legged partridges' nests in trees.

The chief interest of Gondla lies in the Thakur's castle, which is unique in Lahul. From the Sissoo road the castle is hidden until the traveller comes almost upon it round a corner of the winding road. But from the Kyelang side it is visible from some distance, and frowns upon the weary caravans as they toil along the winding road, as it has frowned for centuries on friend and foe alike. It commands the passage of the valley, and was a strong vantage-point in the struggles that form the stormy history of Lahul ; while in the brief interludes of peace its gloomy loopholes must have been eyed with grave concern by all who passed along the road, wondering whether some unseen sentinel had sent a message to his lord that here was food for plunder, a bale of cloth, a bag of grain, a fine fat sheep, a pretty daughter—what was the Thakur's mood that day ? —what was the tax and pleasure of the Lord of the Road ?

The keep is built of the pattern so familiar in the Himalayas, an alternation of wood and stone, several courses of stone, and then a long beam to bind them. It rises seven stories high and is crowned with a broad wooden balcony, closed in on every side. This tower is several centuries old, and tradition relates that the architect was put to death so that he might build anew for no rival baron. The various stories are pierced with loopholes for the archers and with windows, the openings of which are largely blocked with carved woodwork, so that the snow may not enter. Round the tower huddle numerous buildings of different size and purport grouped about a court-yard, with a single entrance, the whole forming a



(Upper) A BRIDGE OF BIRCH TWIGS IN LAHUL

(Lower) THE CASTLE OF THE THAKURS OF GONDLA, 10,000 FEET,  
CHANDRA VALLEY



strong and easily defended post in the primitive warfare of its youth.

By the courtesy of the young Wazir of Lahul I was allowed to visit the castle and meet the aged Thakur, who was living, as his fathers had lived before him, in patriarchal simplicity. Apart from the tower his ancestral home was much like all the other large houses of Lahul. The ground floor was composed of cattle byres and barns, and the living rooms to which the family retire in winter when the upper stories become too cold for habitation. In the centre of the house a central hall or small courtyard was open to the sky, and many rooms round it drew their light and air from this shaft. The old Thakur was sitting in one of these rooms, and, though enfeebled by age and failing sight, he courteously rose for his interview with me, while the servants of the household stood round about. He gave me permission to climb the tower, and, bidding him farewell, we left him to his repose.

The visit gave me a most interesting view of the mediæval simplicity of life in Lahul. In one room was the chapel of the castle, served by the family priest, or lama. Here on a raised dais across the back of the room was seated the image of Buddha, flanked with the likenesses of famous lamas of Tibet and with various figures from the Hindu Pantheon. Before them were ornaments and offerings and numerous little cups of brass, in which were burning oil and ghee, while the smell of incense filled the air. About the room were prayer-wheels and banners, and paintings of gods and saints covered the walls.

Another room was doubtless the ancient armoury, for here were enormous wooden chests of rough design, and in an embrasure were lying the fragments of a suit of mail, scale armour after the Tibetan fashion ; a greave with its knee-cap was still complete. A small piece of the armour was given to me ;

it consists of oblong scales of iron, about two inches long, overlapping and joined with leathern thongs. On one of the chests was the huge pinion of a griffon vulture, and this they told me was kept to provide the feathering of arrows. There were some round bucklers and bundles of arrows in the room, and these, though modern, and used in the annual games, were doubtless true to the ancient pattern. Later on I was shown the site for the games, which is on a level piece of ground beside the road to Kyelang. Here the young bloods congregate to try their skill in archery, and wild races are ridden on the sturdy hill ponies. A little mound serves as the grand stand for the Thakur's family and his friends, while the villagers congregate around to watch the fun.

Mention may here be made of the incised stone slabs which are to be seen at Gondla and Kolong, bearing human figures greater than life-size. From the pointed crowns on the heads of some of these figures I assume that they represent Hindu deities, but their origin is unknown to me. The Lahulas themselves declare that they are the life-size representations of a former race of giants that inhabited Lahul, the smaller ones being said to represent children of that race.

Above Gondla a short cut to Kyelang leads over the range which lies between the two places, and at this point attains a height of 13,000 feet. On one occasion I travelled by this route, which, though long and tiresome, is not difficult. We rode on ponies up the long side of the range, which rises 3000 feet from Gondla in a succession of steep slopes and curves. The ground was stony, but there was sufficient grass and various Alpine plants to furnish grazing for sheep and ponies. We followed no definite path, but rode amongst the mounds and hollows, picking the easiest way for the ponies and aiming for some rough stone monuments that stood out above high up on the hill-side.

From there was visible the gap in the rocky crest of the hill that marks the Pass. Along the crest at this spot are several small monuments or shrines, which bristle with sticks set up to carry the tatters and shreds of cloth that represent prayer-flags. From there we had a magnificent view. Below the ridge, on either side, flowed the Chandra and Bhaga rivers in their deep-cut valleys. We were in the midst of a ring of snow-clad mountains, which on every side towered up on a level with us, snowy peak and icy glacier alternating, here clear cut against the sky, there wreathed in misty cloud. To the south we looked down on Gondla, with its castle in the green setting of its willow-trees, 3000 feet below us ; across the valley the Rhotang range stretched in a mighty mass, its grandeur and its nakedness enhanced by the scanty veil of pine and birch that lay across its flank. To the north the ranges of the Baralacha, sister to the Rhotang in her wild beauty ; but her veil was the spotted texture of the juniper, which straggled down the valley and ended in the green fields and willow groves of Kyelang.

The descent to Kyelang is far stiffer than the climb from Gondla. The northern crest of the range is very sheer and rugged for the first few hundred feet, and it is quite impossible to ride. Indeed, alone, I should never have attempted even to lead the ponies down it, but the Lahulas assured me that it was the custom to take ponies down the rough path ; and down they went safely enough, scrambling and slipping and showering down a cascade of stones : and so in due course we reached the Bhaga and crossed it by the narrow bridge that spans its rocky channel here. But in future I shall stick to the road from Gondla to Kyelang.

The road from Gondla leads past various magnificent cliffs to the junction of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers at Tandi. At this point the road crosses the

Bhaga river by a large cantilever bridge ; but on the occasion of my last visit the bridge, which had been in need of rebuilding for some time past, had been swept away by the river, and it was only possible to reach Kyelang by a long and difficult detour to the small bridge that connects it with the short cut to Gondla. Bringing up the beams for the new bridge was such a long and difficult process that it was necessary to spend large sums of money on making the detour fit for mule traffic, or the whole summer's trade would have been lost to Lahul and Kulu.

From Tandi one road leads down the valley of the Chandra-Bhaga to the famous temple of Trilok-nath in Chamba, which is a great objective for pilgrims.

Communication with the area of Lahul that borders on Bara Bengahal is established also at Tandi by means of a jhula, the type of bridge that was established in the Higher Himalayas long before the advent of the British, and is now largely giving place to the cantilever. The jhula is a suspension bridge, made of twisted ropes of birch twigs, which are swung across the river from rough stone towers. Four thick ropes form the main structure of the bridge, two for the footway and two for the hand-rails ; these are joined together by a webbing of smaller ropes, and along them is laid a flooring composed of a single width of rough plank. The first passage of one of these bridges is a nervous performance ; it is easy enough to climb on to the end of the bridge and start along where the guide ropes still maintain the stiffness and elevation that they have received from the stone towers, but nearer and nearer to the centre the ropes sag until the hand-rails are only a foot or two from the foot-plank, and the whole structure sways and quivers with one's progress, while the rushing waters below provoke a feeling of giddiness. On a still bright day the crossing of a jhula is merely a somewhat exciting

experience, and sheep and goats can be dragged across ; but in rough and stormy weather the passage is difficult and even dangerous, the ropes swaying to such an extent that men sometimes lose their hold and fall into the water. I heard of one case in which the ropes broke and eight men fell with them, to perish in the river. These bridges are erected by the people themselves, several villages combining to share the labour involved in the cutting and plaiting of the birch twigs. The ropes are taken down and stored during the winter, and thus with occasional repairs a single bridge is made to last three or four years.

There is one final point of interest at Tandi in the monastery and temple of Guru Gantal, which stands high on the mountain angle between the junction of the Chandra and Bhaga, a bleak and barren site. The temple is an ancient Buddhist structure of wood, with a pyramidal roof and some interesting carvings ; in it is preserved a marble head of a statue said to have been found in the Bhaga river. Guru Gantal is the largest and most noted of the monasteries in Lahul, and it holds a large area of land in different places as an endowment. Much of this land is held by tenants, who pay their rent both in kind and by service ; the rent in kind consists of local necessities—shoulders of mutton, corn, pots of spirit, sandals of plaited straw and the like ; while the fixed services include the cultivation of the rest of the monastery land, the bringing in of faggots for winter fuel, the sweeping off of snow from the monastery roof, portage, the running of errands, and the hundred-and-one jobs that arise in life.

An annual tribute to the value of thirty rupees is sent to the abbot of the Stagna monastery in Ladakh, who forwards it with other tribute to Kangri Donján, near the Mansarovar Lake in Chinese Tibet : from thence it goes in the same way to the monastery of Pangtang Dechinling in Butan, whose abbot bears the title of

Nawang Namgyal, and appears in the Buddhist hierarchy to be over the abbots of these subordinate monasteries. The chain doubtless reflects the history of the gradual establishment of the monasteries by missionaries sent out from each parent centre in turn.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RELIGION AND PEOPLE OF LAHUL

As the debatable land between three kingdoms, it is inevitable that the present state of Lahul should reflect the influences of her stormy history ; for we find in this tiny province a curious mixture of language, of race and of religion, which each in turn afford some clue to that past on which written records are so silent. But it is difficult to disentangle the threads in such a manner as to afford an intelligible guide to the whole.

We saw in the chapter describing the physical features of Lahul how the heart of the country lies in the rich warm valleys about the junction of the Chandra-Bhaga ; it is the junction of three roads, three avenues of approach, three lines of danger. Whatever influence comes to soften or to harden the heart of Lahul it must come by one of these three avenues, for the mighty ranges fence them in and narrow every issue. The northern defile leads to Ladakh, to Western Tibet, ultimately to China ; on this gate hammers the Mongolian, now advancing with Tartar spears, now pressing forward in the lama's habit—greedy, cruel, relentless. The western defile leads to the kingdom of Chamba ; the third is the road to Kulu : rival kingdoms these for centuries, but united in that they represented the Hindu Aryan influences that for ever fought with the Mongolian for the body and soul of Lahul.

The written history of Lahul begins with its mention in A.D. 635 by Hiuen Tsiang, who describes it as a country named Lo-hu-lo, lying north-east of

Kulu. From then till the advent of British rule, in 1846, the history of the kingdom is a history of the obscure kings and rajas, Mongolian and Hindu, who fought and intrigued for its possession with ever-shifting boundaries. The details of their varying fortunes I shall not attempt to set down here, but it may be possible to explain their bearing on present Lahul, with its strange mixture of race, religion and language.

There are four languages spoken in Lahul, in addition to the English and Urdu, which are creeping in as a result of British rule. Tibetan is the *lingua franca* spoken and understood throughout the country, in addition to the three dialects, Bunan, Manchat and Tinan, which are each localised in different areas of the valleys. These three dialects are said to be non-Aryan and only distantly related to Tibetan ; their real affinity is with the Mundari languages of the aborigines of India. The Reverend Francke, who is the chief authority on the history of Lahul, draws from this the conclusion that the prehistoric Lahulas were a mixed race of Mundari aborigines and Tibetans, whose amalgamation took place in Lahul some two thousand years before Christ. Bunan is the mother-tongue of the Bhaga Valley, and contains, as we should expect, a greater admixture of Tibetan words ; while Manchat is the language of Pattan, the Chandra-Bhaga Valley, and there the Tibetan will find most difficulty in making himself understood.

The mixture of tribes and castes illustrates more clearly the rival influences. At the bottom of the scale are the Dagis and Lohars : of these the lower are the Lohars, whom legend relates to have come from Kulu with the seed corn, and who perhaps are the last representatives of the wave of migration that brought the Mundari dialect to Lahul ; the Dagis are somewhat higher in the scale and represent more recent immigration.

At the head of the scale come the Thakur families, while the mass of the population is composed of Kanets and Brahmins, two classes of cultivators.

The Thakurs are of pure Mongolian origin and spring from the old ruling aristocracy of the country. Three families of Thakurs hold jagirs at the present day—namely, the Thakurs of Kolong, Gúngrang and Gondla—but the fourth, and in some respects the most important, family, of Barbog, has somewhat fallen from its high estate.

The Thakurs of Barbog had their castle on the left bank of the Bhaga, opposite Kyelang at Kardang, which was the original capital of Lahul, and commanded the old trade route which then ran on that side of the river. Their origin and sympathies appear to have been the most clearly Tibetan, and in politics they sided with the kings of Ladakh, which led to their downfall when the Kulu rajas invaded Lahul in the late seventeenth century. The family still keeps up the custom of lighting a large bonfire to announce the new year to the Lahulas.

The Thakurs of Gúngrang and Gondla need not detain us, and we have already visited the castle of the latter family.

The Thakurs of Kolong now reap the reward of their ancestors' sagacity. They early realised that the star of the Rajput was in the ascendant and that the day of the Mongol had closed. They submitted to the Kulu rajas and espoused their cause so warmly that even the Tibetan names in their genealogy appear to have been altered to show a Rajput origin. This policy paid, for the family has held the lordship of Lahul under the British Government for the last seventy years, and their rule has been beneficial to the country. The late representative of the line, Thakur Amar Chand, seized the opportunity offered to him by the war, and did valuable work in recruiting, finally proceeding in person to Mesopotamia as a

jemadar in the 6th Labour Corps, with a fine body of Lahulas serving under him. He was given the title of Rai Bahadur in 1917 as a reward for his administrative and war services, but a useful life came to an early end in 1921, to the great regret both of Government and his own subjects. In the Thakur families the rule of primogeniture obtains, but at Thakur Amar Chand's death his son, Thakur Abhai Chand, was still a minor, and the administration was vested for two years in Thakur Mangal Chand, brother of the late Thakur. He is, however, now gradually handing over control to Thakur Abhai Chand, whose character and abilities encourage the hope that he will prove a worthy son of his father.

In the two classes of the Kanets and Brahmins the besetting influences of Lahul are again most clearly seen. The Kanets are Mongolian in origin, and they predominate in Gara and Ranglo, as the cultivated valleys of the Bhaga and Chandra are called. The Brahmins are of Hindu origin, and they hold the fertile tract of Pattan, the valley of the Chandra-Bhaga. There is, of course, some slight fusion between these two diverse elements ; but a common Mongolian origin connects the Kanets more closely with their Thakur overlords.

Of the two small communities of Hesis and Bálrás, the former are Mongolian minstrels who appear to have reached Lahul in the train of the Thakurs.

Religion follows race. Hindu and Mongolian have struggled, consciously and unconsciously, for the mastery of Lahul, its lands and bodies ; so, too, has the soul of Lahul been the prize in an unending struggle between the disciples of the Buddha and the devotees of Shiva, with the result that the religion of the country is a curious compromise between Buddhism and Hinduism.

According to the Reverend Francke the aboriginal religion of Lahul was probably a form of nature-

worship in which the creative powers of sun and water were worshipped under the symbols of the phallus and the snake. Traces of this religion still linger in the country side by side with the more modern religions that have overlaid it, but its most marked feature is, happily, dead. No longer is some poor shivering wretch slain on the altar that his fellows may reap a plenteous harvest ; no longer is the spirit of famine exorcised with blood. The tradition of these ancient sacrifices still lingers in the land, but we may credit their suppression to the statute of the sublime Buddha : " Thou shalt not kill."

It is said that Buddhism originally entered Lahul in the eighth century after Christ, from the direction of India, and the credit for this is given to the celebrated Buddhist missionary of that era, Padma Sambhava, who seems to have visited Lahul and personally to have founded the monastery of Guru Gantal. Three ancient temples, those of Guru Gantal, Kangani and Triloknath, just over the border in Chamba, are attributed to this original fount of Buddhism, differing from the temples founded under Tibetan influence in their pyramidal roofs and carved woodwork ; the other monasteries and temples of Lahul show in their flat roofs their connection with the Lamaistic Buddhism which entered the country from Tibet about the twelfth century. The earlier Indian Buddhism appears to have flourished in Lahul with no stronger rival than the aboriginal nature-religion ; but the Tibetan Buddhism entered by the northern gate about the same time as the Aryan Hinduism was invading the country from the side of Chamba, and from then onwards both religions flourished, together merging gradually into the curious mixture which now is the characteristic of Lahul.

No survey of the religions of Lahul, however cursory, would be complete without some mention of

the Moravian mission at Kyelang. This station was opened in 1854 under Pastors Heyde, Pagel and Yaschke, and in their and other hands flourished and did good work until 1915, when the mission was closed in consequence of the repatriation of the missionaries as alien subjects. At the time of my visits to Lahul there was only one Ladakhi pastor in charge of the mission, and the Christian Church in Lahul is perhaps to be regarded as moribund. But in its day the mission had a great and living influence ; the actual number of converts was small, but the influence of the pastors was good, and they helped the people with education and medical aid, and by the introduction of potatoes, rye and Lombardy poplars. The pastors did good work with their studies of the folk-lore and languages of the region, but the greatest work of the Moravian mission was probably done through its printing press. On the press at Kyelang were printed many valuable books in Tibetan and other local dialects dealing with the Christian religion and with the study of the dialects.

Undoubtedly some of the most interesting features of Lahul to the traveller are connected with the Buddhist religion and the illustrations that it affords of the customs of Western Tibet. In the Pattan Valley a class is found which openly professes to follow both Hinduism and Buddhism : as Buddhists they maintain gonpas, as Hindus they abjure beef, including under this heading even the flesh of the yak ; and in time of trouble they call in both lamas and Brahmins, who practise their diverse rites at one and the same time—a convenient system for those who are in doubt as to the one true religion. But in the more truly Tibetan areas of the separate Chandra and Bhaga valleys Buddhism alone is professed, and is here found in its truer form, though still with some additions from Hinduism.

I visited several of the gonpas, or monasteries,

and found them exceedingly interesting, though it is difficult for one to gain a very accurate idea of the monastic system without long residence in the country.

The ordinary gonpa of Lahul is a large and irregular building with a flat roof ; it is composed of rough mud walls built on a framework of beams. The lower stories are ill-lit and ill-ventilated, as is inevitable in a country of heavy snowfall, where it is not the custom to use glass or horn windows. The upper stories, for summer use, are more open, with balconies leading out on to the flat roofs. It is notable that the gonpas are usually perched in very picturesque situations high on the hill-side, only to be reached by rough and steep paths. I inquired the reason for this one day from one of the Thakurs, and he informed me that hospitality to the traveller was one of the first duties of monastic life : " So," he continued, with a twinkle in his eye, " in actual practice it is better not to have the monastery by the roadside ! " But this was probably a libel, for solitude and aloofness from the ways of man have ever been essentials of monkish life in all countries.

One of the finest gonpas in the country is that of Sha-Shur, which is situated on the hill-side some 1500 or 2000 feet above Kyelang ; it stands in the midst of the open Juniper Forest, and is reached by a steep path, roughly cut and worn, on the hill-side. As one reaches the willow grove that surrounds the building the path passes an enormous chorten erected in honour of some famous lama. In front of the monastery there is a small sunken court, about the size of an ordinary badminton lawn, partly cut out of the sloping hill-side and partly built up with low walls ; at one end a sort of covered dais has been erected, for this court is the scene of the annual devil dance for which the monastery of Sha-Shur is renowned. At the opposite end to the dais a rough

flight of steps leads up to the principal door of the monastery. Within is the labyrinth of rooms which serve the varied needs of the monks. They are ill-lit and poorly furnished, but there is no difficulty in recognising the refectory, from the presence of the big wooden churn in which is made the sweet Tibetan tea. In the heart of the building is a large square room, fronted at one end by an open courtyard and surrounded on the other three sides by a large passage. We enter the passage, and the lamas with us are careful to see that we turn to the left and proceed in that direction. All along the inner side of the passage, against the wall of the central room, a row of prayer-wheels are set in order at a convenient height from the ground, about the level of a man's shoulder. These prayer-wheels are wooden drums, a foot or more in height, ornamented with a text in large Bhotia lettering ; they each contain innumerable texts written on paper and packed as tightly as may be into the drum, so that each contains several thousand texts. They are all set into the wall in a horizontal line, with their long axis downwards, supported by central wooden shafts, on which they revolve ; and as each monk or Lahula passes along the passage he runs his hand along the surface of the drums, setting them all revolving. One revolution of the wheel and every prayer within it has been said and laid up to the credit of the hand that turned the wheel. We emerge from the passage amidst the creaking and groaning of the prayer-wheels and find ourselves in front of the door of the central room, which forms the chapel of the monastery. It is a large room, and the ceiling is supported by several wooden pillars let into the floor. There are no windows, and light enters the chapel only by the open door and from a square aperture in the ceiling which looks into an upper room, of which one side is open to the sky. Across the back of the room runs a broad and high

dais, on which are placed the sacred images. These are of various sizes, and represent Hindu deities, celebrated lamas and the Buddha. The majority of the figures are made of well-modelled clay, coloured and gilt with excellent workmanship, so that it is difficult to realise the material of which they are made ; a few of the smallest are of brass. Before the dais stands a tray of small brass cups in which lighted wicks are fed with ghee ; here, too, are small offerings, and the smell of incense fills the air. The attendant lama approaches with a thin lighted taper of incense and hands it to me to hold while I am in the sacred chamber.

To the left of the dais stands a huge cylindrical prayer-wheel, the size of a barrel, and as the devout slowly push it round, the striking of a bell announces the completion of a revolution and the thousands of prayers within.

Painted banners, dim with age and blackened by the smoke from the altar, hang from the rafter beams, and dusty streamers of muslin bedeck the images.

The walls are covered with frescoes, which peer strangely out of the gloomy corners of the room. Buddhist saint and Hindu deity are there, wrapped in age-long contemplation, or reliving the storied details of their history. They are executed in a conventional but vigorous style with bright Tibetan colours, and exhibit an artistic sense and power of draughtsmanship which are not found in purely Indian paintings of a similar type.

In a corner lies a dusty heap of the huge masks and hats of painted clay which are used for the devil dance.

The upper room may be regarded as the library of the monastery. A low wooden railing surrounds the aperture in the floor which lets light into the chapel. In front of the railing small tables hold a few sacred

objects. Across the back of the room a large rack with wide pigeon-holes contains the books belonging to the monastery. These are all of the Tibetan type, written in the Bhotia script by monkish hands, or printed from the rough wooden dies of Tibet. Each book consists of long narrow pages, with text on both sides, not fastened together, but contained between two separate covers of wood tied round with string, and usually well wrapped up in a cloth.

The lamas have no objection to the chapel and library being visited, and indeed our interest in them seems to be regarded as a compliment and viewed with complacency ; but as we turn to leave the lamas are careful to see that we enter the opposite side of the passage from our arrival, and in going out complete the circuit of the chapel, again to the sound of revolving prayer-wheels.

I was much struck in Lahul by the universal belief in the efficacy of the circle that follows the course of the sun. Prayer-wheels, of course, are common. We have seen the type that is set up in the monasteries, and the small hand type carried by lamas and mendicants is a familiar curio to all who have visited the tourist centres of India ; a third kind of prayer-wheel is worked by water on the principle of a water-mill, and this reduces the principle of mechanical prayer to an absurdity. But the Lahula goes further : in the monastery we went from left to right round the passage that encircled the chapel ; and the principle is further exemplified by the mané walls. These walls are a familiar sight in Lahul : they vary in size up to twenty or thirty yards in length, and are about eight or ten feet in breadth. The lower portion of the wall is simply built of rough undressed stones, without mortar, in the ordinary way ; on this are heaped loose stones, inscribed with the Buddhist text : "Om mani padmi haun," carved in low relief. There appears to be some doubt as to the exact significance



(Upper) A CANTILEVER BRIDGE IN THE UPPER BHAGA VALLEY

(Lower) WOMEN OF LAHUL WORKING IN THE FIELDS



of this expression, which may be translated: "O God ! the jewel in the lotus." It is apparently of Sanscrit rather than of Tibetan influence, and is of the nature of a sacred and protecting symbol, such as the making of the sign of the Cross by Catholics. It is of such efficacy that its mere repetition orally or by mechanical means is of the highest value. Man, woman and child alike repeat it incessantly during the varied labours of the day ; prayer-wheel and hand-wheel and water-wheel grind it out hour by hour ; it flutters in the breeze on the prayer-flags ; its repetition by every means is greater than that of any other prayer in the world. Learned lamas may debate on the mystic value of the syllables that compose the phrase, on the divine essence of the *Om* that signifies the absolute and supreme Godhead in all its attributes, on the six classes of beings for which it is a prayer, but to the ordinary Tibetan mind the sentence is simply something to cling to, ineffably potent in a difficult world.

The stones on the mané walls are carved by lamas and others, and there is merit in the addition of each fresh stone to the wall. The walls are erected by some path or road, and it will be noticed that a track is worn along each side of them ; for the Lahula, as he passes, is careful always to keep the wall on his right hand, so that in coming and going on a journey he has completed the circle of the wall.

The circle on foot of the sacred mountain, the Drilburi, on which stands the monastery of Guru Gantal, is regarded as a pilgrimage of great religious efficiency, and it is customary for the devout to trudge the eighteen miles round at the spring festival of the Ghantal Tsátsa. The Lahula, however, is nothing but practical, and if he has occasion to journey between Koksar and Kyelang he is careful to travel by the road on one journey and the short cut over the ridge between Gondla and Kyelang on the other,

so that in coming and going he has completed the circle of the holy mountain.

Finally, the most meritorious pilgrimage of all is to do the difficult circle of the central core of Lahul—from Kyelang over the Baralacha, and round the course of the Chandra back to Tandi and Kyelang. This is rarely accomplished, and I found that the Thakur of Lahul was glad to travel with me when I went by that route to Spiti, as it gave him the credit for the pilgrimage.

The lamas are not usually resident in the monasteries. Many of them are married and possess their own houses and fields, and merely take their turn of duty. It has been my good fortune twice to see the devil dance at the gonpa of Sha-Shur. On the first occasion a dance was arranged specially for my edification through the good offices of Thakur Mangal Chand, who was then in charge of the administration of Lahul. It was necessary to give a few days' notice, as at the time there were not sufficient lamas in residence, and notice had to be sent out round the valley to call them in. They assembled in due course, and I went up to the monastery, accompanied by an artillery subaltern, who happened to be in the valley in search of ibex. We were received most hospitably by the abbot, who showed us round the buildings before the dance, and ended by presenting me with one of the grotesque masks that the dancers wear. On this occasion of course we did not witness the full ceremonies, and I was glad therefore, in July 1922, to find that my arrival in Kyelang coincided with the annual festival of the devil dance, which is usually exhibited but once a year.

This occasion will be described in the next chapter.

Religious festivals occupy a great place in the life of the people of Lahul, as in the case of most primitive peoples. In addition to attending the devil dance at Sha-Shur and the Ghantal Tsátsa, all who can

endeavour to make the pilgrimage to Triloknath at the end of August, where the festival lasts for two days ; the oracle is consulted, and public worship and offerings are made with sacrifices and much drinking. This shrine has some connection with Riwalsar in Mandi State, where also the devout Lahula will endeavour to go more than once in his lifetime.

Various ceremonies are observed in spring in connection with the cultivation of the fields. The day for the commencement of the ploughing is fixed by some lama skilled in astrology, and when the seed has been sown the fields are blessed. I saw this ceremony at Kyelang, when a small procession came round the fields, headed by a few lamas, with two drums. A number of sacred books were carried on their backs by the cultivators who followed the lamas, and after the completion of the prayers the proceedings terminated with a small feast.

The fields of sprouting corn will be observed to be dotted with small sprigs of juniper stuck into the ground. This is done in the course of another ceremony which is intended to ensure that each seed that has germinated may produce many ears.

No account of Lahul can omit mention of the chorten, which is a familiar sight in the inhabited parts of the country. The chorten is a nearly solid edifice of mud bricks, built in the form of a large square base in several sections, on which is placed the larger half of an inverted cone ; from the top of this rises a tapering pillar of wood, carved with horizontal grooves and surmounted by a crescent, with a ball in the horns. The chortens were originally receptacles for the relics of departed saints and offerings to them, but in due course they came to be regarded as holy symbols and were built empty as mere memorials of the dead, whether the dead be some well-known saint or some local landowner. Thus a chorten may be found built alone by the

road-side or near a mané wall, as an act of piety, or several chortens may be built together as memorials to the different members of one family. Small chortens of wood or metal are sometimes placed in houses, and in one of the Thakur's mansions, near Kyelang, there is a fine chorten made of silver, with ornamentation of semi-precious stones.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DEVIL DANCE OF THE SHA-SHUR MONASTERY

THE annual devil dance, or miracle play, of the Sha-Shur Gonpa, above Kyelang, takes place in June or July. In 1922 the play took place on the 4th July, and by a lucky chance I was able to be in Kyelang on that date, and it was arranged that the Thakurs should escort me up to see it. The road up to the monastery from the village of Kyelang is steep, but it is possible to ride up on a stout hill pony, and the Thakurs kindly brought a Zanskar pony for me to ride.

We started from the rest-house about an hour before noon, and soon fell in with numbers of Lahulas who were climbing up the path on their way to combine religion with pleasure. Women were largely in the majority, and each was carrying a heavy bundle slung in a blanket across her back ; these bundles contained offerings for the lamas, mostly of grain, and such offerings given at this festival constitute a very important item in the income of the monastery.

The road runs through the open Juniper Forest, and at the spot where it enters the willow grove that is planted round the monastery there is an enormous chorten. We rounded this and found ourselves overlooking the stage, which is a small sunken square in front of the door of the monastery. On the upper side this square is cut out of the slope of the hill-side, while on the lower a wall banks it up. A long flight of rough steps runs down to it from the main door ; at the farther end there is a long narrow dais, which extends the whole side of the stage and is covered

with a rough roof, supported on pillars ; the central portion of this is raised above the remainder. The square itself is open to the sky and is grass grown, save for a circular path trodden out by the feet of generations of dancers. The hill-side about the stage is covered with well-grown pollard willows on little terraces, which afford a welcome shade to the audience in this alfresco theatre.

Carpets had been spread along the upper border of the stage, and on this were placed four chairs for the two young Thakurs and myself and for the Indian surgeon who is posted during the summer months in charge of a dispensary at Kyelang. Our various orderlies and servants settled themselves comfortably on the ground about the chairs, and we then awaited the appearance of the dancers. Some time elapsed before the proceedings started, and we had plenty of opportunity to look about us at the audience which was grouped around, sitting on the grass under the trees and about the walls of the stage.

Behind us the hill-side was crowded with Lahuli women, chattering away with the utmost vivacity and enjoyment, and munching the barley grain with which one and all appeared to be provided. There were comparatively few men in the audience, and these were mostly grouped about the steps and on the wall at the lower side of the stage. Here and there—of course in the best places—were groups of boys, also chewing barley and indulging in the sly jokes and horseplay common to the youth of all countries. All the men and boys wore tufts of artificial or dried flowers in their hats as their gala costume ; many had sprigs of pale yellow, composed of young barley grown in the dark to rob it of colour. Otherwise they were habited in their workaday garments. The women, however, appeared to have dressed up for the occasion, and looked very prosperous and pleasing. The Lahuli woman is a jovial, smiling lass of a

Mongolian type, plump but seldom fat. Her broad, round face, while never beautiful, is seldom ugly, and on a gala day it shines with a liberal application of some toilet-oil ; the hair is parted down the centre of the head and is closely plastered over the sides and drawn back into innumerable fine plaits, which hang down the back and are all attached to a square plate of shell, usually mother-of-pearl ; from this hang two strings of brass beads, which pass under the girdle and end in little bells. There is no purdah system in Lahul, save to a limited extent in the families of the Thakurs, who have assimilated a good many Rajput ideas since the day of their submission to the rajas of Kulu. The Lahuli woman wears no veil and goes bare-headed, save for a curious mushroom-shaped ornament of silver, which is attached to the top of the head by a few plaits of hair. A large round lump of amber is worn over each temple, and these ornaments are highly prized. There is no variety in the dress ; each woman wears a long robe-like coat, secured at the waist with a broad girdle, and underneath it loose trousers. Both these garments are made of a thick dark brown woollen material. A small coarse shawl is often carried over the shoulders.

Ordinarily no ornaments are worn save those described above, with an occasional bracelet or necklace, but on this day I saw for the first time the very distinctive head-dress of Lahul. Each woman was wearing over her ears a series of interlaced circles of silver links ; these circles were fastened side by side, so as to stand out in a sort of broad fan on each side of the face, framing it with becoming effect. There was some variation in this head-dress, according, doubtless, with the station and wealth of the wearer.

The woollen garments of all were clean and fresh, and a few carried black umbrellas, which were no doubt intended as much to indicate the fashionableness of the owner as to shelter her from the sun

during the long toil up to the gonpa : for the umbrella, as we know it, is not indigenous to Lahul, but is imported from the plains by way of Kulu.

For a while the stage remained empty, and I had plenty of time to inspect the audience and watch the stream of people who entered the monastery with their offerings, and later emerged empty-handed to find their places on the hill-side.

Then suddenly a bare-headed lama ran down the steps on to the stage and began to arrange various properties on the dais. Cushions were already lying there set out in order, and in front of the central seat, under the raised portion of the roof, now draped with faded hangings, a little Tibetan table of painted wood was placed. On this he laid out with care a small brass hand-bell and a "durji," the curious little mace of brass that appears to be the mystic symbol of a lama's office. Several folded cloth mitres had already been laid out before the different seats. The stage was set for the ceremony to begin.

At this juncture the abbot of the monastery, who was already known to me, came along to where I was sitting and with a courteous gesture of welcome presented me with three sticks of burning incense. He was a youngish ascetic-looking man, of cultivated appearance, who had made pilgrimage to some of the Buddhist monasteries beyond Darjeeling, and had in consequence introduced several innovations in the services under his control.

The clash of a hand-drum and cymbals then drew a portion of the audience to the gonpa door to witness the hanging up on the wall of a portrait banner of some goddess, which was done with a good deal of ceremony. After this the proceedings fairly started.

First the abbot and some of his satellites emerged from the gonpa door, moved slowly down the steps, and crossed the stage to the dais, where they solemnly seated themselves on the cushions and assumed their

mitres. The abbot was in the central seat in front of the little table, and on his right hand sat his brother, the second lama, who appeared to be an albino. All sat cross-legged, and the more important lamas wore reddish robes in place of the customary brown. The group on the dais were very impressive in their dignified mien and solemnity, but there was one incongruous element : the abbot and his brother wore dark sun-glasses, of the pince-nez type, very modern and very Western in origin, out of place in their Tibetan setting.

In addition to presiding over the ceremony the little group of lamas on the dais were to act as orchestra ; several held small hand-drums, flat and circular on long handles, somewhat after the shape of a warming-pan. These were struck with a curious long curved stick, shaped like a mark of interrogation, with a small pad at the extremity. There was a fine pair of brass cymbals, and the abbot's little brass bell was tinkled at intervals with effective emphasis.

The orchestra was ready and the audience were awaiting the starting of the dance, all agog with expectation, when the first of the dancers appeared with a run and flourish down the steps. These were four lamas dressed in tight white clothes, with round white masks picked out in crimson to represent grinning skulls. They were followed by a bare-headed lama in ordinary monastic dress, who carried a long leather flagellum, composed of several thongs. This individual proved to be the counterpart of the buffoon who was always introduced in the old English morality plays, his function being to lighten the tedium of the proceedings with bouts of horseplay calculated to amuse the lowest elements in the audience. He remained on the stage for the whole of the subsequent proceedings, fussing about generally, and seldom doing anything more important than delivering a terrific blow on the ground with his whip.

The four Death's-heads made a preliminary circle round the stage and then darted up the steps again and disappeared into the gonpa, emerging a moment later carrying by the four corners a large dark cloth. In the centre of the cloth was a small flat iron box, triangular in shape, and painted black. With some ceremony this was slowly carried up and deposited on the ground in front of the abbot's seat. It was then taken up again and placed in the centre of the stage, where it remained for the rest of the play, sometimes wrapped up and sometimes uncovered, the centre and focus of all the dances that followed. Having disposed the little box in the centre of the stage to their satisfaction, the Death's-heads proceeded to dance around it. There was none of the wild frenzy and noise which one is accustomed to associate with the idea of a devil dance. The lamas beat their drums and clashed the cymbals with occasional emphasis from the little bell, but it was to a regular rhythmic beat, level and restrained, accompanied by an occasional chant or broken by a prayer. The dancers circled round the stage, posturing and waving their arms, now moving slowly, now breaking into a run as the music quickened, but always with a sense of dignity and restraint.

This set lasted only for a short time and then returned into the gonpa. As they left I leaned across and asked the Thakur what the little black box contained. This was a tactless question and the Thakur was diffident about giving me a clear answer ; but from his paraphrase I gathered that it enclosed some Buddhist equivalent to the Prince of Darkness.

A fresh set of four lamas now appeared down the steps, dressed in the ordinary dancing attire, and for an hour or so dance followed dance with monotonous regularity, with a similarity of chant and posture that has left only a confused image in my mind of rhythmic pacing and bending knees and slowly waving arms.



(Upper) A DEVIL DANCE AT THE SHA-SHUR MONASTERY

(Lower) THE SHA-SHUR MONASTERY AT KYELANG, 10,000 FEET





I have seen it stated that the devil dancers of the Sha-Shur monastery wear "rich dresses of Chinese silk." This was perhaps correct enough originally, when Kyelang was in closer touch with Ladakh, for one lama certainly was wearing the threadbare remains of a fine piece of Chinese embroidery ; but the rest of the troupe attained the same effect, or at least endeavoured to do so, by wearing costumes made of bright flowered chintzes of unmistakable factory origin. These were cut roughly on a Chinese pattern, and were worn with the long cloth boots of Tibet, the soles of which are untanned leather. Each man carried in either hand a bright handkerchief or wisp of cloth, which he employed to emphasise all his postures, waving them about as he moved his arms. I noticed that the fingers were held in the customary manner for warding off the evil eye. The masks were most elaborate structures made of clay modelled over cloth and painted with bright colours. They were worn not on the face but higher up, rather after the cock of a "Dolly Varden" hat, the wearer looking through the mouth of the mask and concealing his face with a handkerchief drawn over the lower part. There were various patterns : the simplest form was frankly a circular hat, with a broad brim edged with fur, and a small circular crown surmounted by a sort of finial or crocket—to use an architectural figure for which I can find no sartorial equivalent. Other masks represented ugly demoniacal faces, some with horns, after the fashion of yaks. One depicted a Hindu deity with several tiers of heads, one above the other, and looking all ways; while another had reproduced, with haunting success, the female face, with a peculiarly inane smile, that is seen in so many Hindu sculptures.

No sooner was the dance well under way than two of the disguised lamas left the stage and started to collect largess from the audience, after they had

extracted a rupee apiece from the Thakur and myself. Their progress was attended by a good deal of disturbance amongst the audience, as after visiting the official row they turned their attention almost entirely to the ladies, and made the collection an excuse for a good deal of pinching and sly innuendo, which was taken as peculiarly humorous from monkish lips. Coin of the realm was scarce, and in lieu of it most of the women contributed two or three of the large needles which all seemed to carry, stuck in their garments.

The succession of dances grew monotonous, and I was beginning to wonder when relief would come when it arrived from an unexpected quarter. An uproar started on the outskirts of the crowd above us, and at last the cause was revealed in a terrific dog-fight. The women scattered right and left as two big dogs gradually worked down the hill-side in a snarling, whirling mass towards the stage. They were separated with difficulty before they reached the stage, but honour was not satisfied, and they seized a later opportunity to renew the struggle and repeat the wild success of their performance.

At last an interval was reached, and the dancers and orchestra left the stage and retired into the gonpa.

The audience with one accord betook themselves to light refreshment, and I took the opportunity to eat a belated lunch in a pleasant nook beneath the willows ; from here I watched the various groups and families as they satisfied the appetites produced by the morning climb to the monastery, and slaked their thirst from the runnels of water that irrigated the grove of willows. Amongst the crowd of sombrely clad Lahula dames there were a few strange types. A Tibetan nomad woman was begging from her more prosperous sisters, her loose wide-sleeved gown of blue and her big cloth boots contrasting with their

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dull woollen clothes, her bare head and greasy pigtail, with the elaborate simplicity of the Lahuli braids and ornaments.

A Ladakhi woman caught sight of me and advanced to beg, while I profited by the occasion to get a nearer glimpse of her strange attire. She wore a rough brown gown and trousers similar to that of Lahul, but the ugly sunburnt face was framed in the curious "berak." This head-dress consists of a broad strip of red felt cloth, studded with rough lumps of turquoise, which falls from the centre of the crown down over the shoulders to the middle of the back, and is connected in front with two broad lappets of black astrachan, which stand out on each side of the face like blinkers. This particular lady was wearing also a huge rough cloak of sheepskin, worn with the wool outwards, which stood stiffly out on each side of her, and completed a very striking *tout ensemble*.

I had just finished my lunch when the sound of drums warned me to return to the stage, and there I found that the abbot was back on the dais, while the lamas were again circling round the little box. The dance that followed was more elaborate than any we had seen, and was based on the actions of a lama who enacted the play of sacrifice to the Devil. He stood in the centre of the ring by the little black box, which was now opened, and appeared to mortal eye to be empty, and went through a long and elaborate pantomime with small clay images and a curious knife with a triangular blade. This I took to be a representation of sacrifice, and it perhaps was based on some traditional memory of the old human sacrifices that were offered up regularly in Kyelang. His movements were accompanied and emphasised by the chorus of dancers who, with the lama orchestra, occasionally broke into a deep chant. At length the dance ended, and the buffoon unceremoniously picked up the little

black box and tipped over the wall the debris of clay that had fallen into it from the little figures. The lamas trooped into the gonpa, abbot and all, and the Thakur then intimated that it was time for me to withdraw ; and this I did, though the proceedings certainly did not terminate, for as we wound down the path to the rest-house we could still hear the beating of drums. But the country beer had commenced to circulate, and I fancy that the subsequent proceedings were best left unchronicled.

## CHAPTER V

### THE IBEX OF LAHUL

IT was a bright summer morning early in June the first time I rode out of Kyelang to travel the stage to Jispar, and my mind was full of anticipations of the unknown road that led towards the Bara-lacha. It was pleasant, too, to be amongst trees again, for we were travelling through the Juniper Forest, and the warm smell of the junipers in the sunlight was very pleasant to the senses ; while the active twittering parties of serin finches gave life and movement to the scene. We were a cheerful party, and the talk soon veered round to stories of sport, and then, of course, to the ibex of Lahul.

As we passed along the road the Thakur told me of the exploits of various sportsmen who had visited the nullahs round about us, their successes and their dismal tales of failure ; and then he told me how in the snow-bound winter the ibex descended from the highest nullahs and came down to the neighbourhood of the villages. He himself had never killed an ibex, it transpired, but Moti Ram, the shikari, had killed several.

I looked at Moti Ram with interest as he trudged behind us. Only on the previous day had he been introduced to me. I had come out of the rest-house and found a wisp of a youth leaning lazily against the rail that runs round the Kyelang verandah ; he told me that he was the shikari who had been summoned to accompany me. I had felt very doubtful about his qualifications ; for the youth before me looked only about sixteen, and he lounged there with a wistful

air, half sad, half reflective, that seemed more suited to a poet and dreamer than to one who would help me to circumvent the wily ibex. He was dressed in an old coat and breeches that had never been made in Lahul, and his legs were encased in a pair of stockings. But the two features of Moti Ram that will always linger in my memory are a rebellious tuft of hair that escaped from under the front of his red cloth cap, and the long thin chain that held together the studs in his shirt.

Yet his appearance belied his capabilities. I was to find out in the three years that I knew him that Moti Ram was a born shikari, with an eye like a hawk, ready to hunt any living thing—ibex or burhel, rose-fin or butterfly ; while his skill with a gun was sufficient to make him head the musketry list in the Territorial regiment that he ultimately joined. On the hill-side he was untiring, and his keenness never abated.

Ibex are found throughout Lahul, and they are fairly plentiful. There is practically no hill and no nullah which does not hold them at some time or other, but their movements depend a good deal on the state of the snow. For when the snow is too heavy in any particular area there is nothing to eat, and when the thaw is complete the Gaddi shepherds take their sheep up to the Alpine pastures, and the ibex perforce have to move on. The presence of snow leopards in any particular nullah is also apt to drive the ibex out.

On this particular trip the Thakur told me that we might expect to find ibex fairly low down in the nullahs beyond Kyelang ; for owing to a late spell of cold weather the sheep had not yet advanced high up into the country, and there had been no sportsmen that year beyond Kyelang. The shooting in Lahul is under the control of the Forest Department, and a limited number of licences to shoot are issued

each year on payment by the Deputy Conservator of Forests stationed in Kulu. But Lahul is so far away from the nearest rail-heads at Pathankote and Simla that the sportsmen who do march up into the country almost invariably spread out into the nullahs about the Chandra Valley, such as Sissoo and Parana Koksar, where ibex may always be found, in preference to marching some stages farther to the good nullahs of the Bhaga Valley.

A few miles beyond Kyelang the hill-sides about the road grow steep and are intersected with cliffs and rocky crags, though the Juniper Forest still continues. As soon as we reached this ground I noticed that Moti Ram began to scan the hill-sides with an evident keenness, which showed that the talk of finding ibex still low in the valley was no idle boast. I had been told to keep my rifle with me, and the Thakur also had had his carried along with us.

It did not, however, seem to me very likely that we really would see ibex from the road, and the carrying of our rifles appeared to be more in the nature of a pious hope. But I was wrong ; for just as the road turned the corner of a rocky crag across the face of some precipitous ground Moti Ram, who was leading on foot, fell back and said there were ibex in the nullah. We hastily dismounted, and sent the men and horses farther back along the road while we considered the situation. Round the corner the road dipped sharply in and out of the nullah in a horizontal right angle, and Moti Ram said that the ibex were in the far side of the nullah, just above the road. He had caught sight of two or three females and had hastily fallen back without having had time to see what the party consisted of, or whether they had taken fright. However it was the easiest ground imaginable for a stalk if the ibex had not at once moved away. We needed only to move up the reverse side of the small spur, round the corner of which we had seen

the ibex, to come out on a level with them in easy rifle shot across the nullah. So the Thakur and I essayed the climb, leaving the other men hidden on the road. The spur was steep, and trying to the breath, but there was no other difficult feature in the stalk, and we were soon in position just behind the crest of the spur. We waited there for a minute to recover our wind and then crawled up to some stones on the crest and looked round them. Our stalk had been successful, our calculations correct, and we lay looking at a dozen ibex as they grazed and slowly moved along the hill-side, scarcely more than a hundred yards from us, across the other side of the gorge. It was a chance in a thousand, but we could not take it, for the party was composed solely of females with one or two kids : there was no head in sight. I gazed my fill, and then startled the ibex, and watched them move off before we returned to the road.

We resumed our march, but delayed a little farther on in pursuit of specimens of small birds amongst the juniper. We were so engaged when three Lahulas travelling on foot along the road caught us up, and, noticing our rifles, volunteered that they had just seen some ibex by the road. As the place they described was, roughly, the spot where the party we had stalked had disappeared amongst the crags, we felt sure that it was no use going back. But the Lahulas were so positive that they had seen a male ibex with horns that I decided to go back and investigate the place in question. This climb was steeper and more difficult, but we duly arrived at a somewhat difficult passage amongst some rocks at the foot of a cliff. Here I sat down for a moment to get my breath, while Moti Ram cautiously scanned the rocky hill-side about us. A little way ahead he found the fresh tracks of ibex, and it was evident that there were some in the immediate neighbourhood, whether or

not they belonged to the same party that we had already stalked. While we were debating what to do, as it was clear that our quarry had moved above us, there was the clatter of a falling stone, and three female ibex, with a very white-looking kid, moved along the rocky crags above us. They apparently had not seen us, though they were evidently aware of our presence, and we crouched motionless, in the very instant hope that a pair of sweeping horns would round some crag. The four animals moved slowly along some fifty yards above us, and each in turn crossed over a projecting cornice, where I could have shot them with the greatest of ease, but no male appeared; and though we carefully searched the ground with glasses, we could see no trace of one. So finally deciding that the Lahulas had been more determined to please than to preserve the unities of truth, we descended to the road, and after a halt for refreshment resumed our march. I remember that as I sat munching my sandwiches a pretty little mouse-hare came out of a pile of boulders on the hill-side and sat watching me, his nostrils and whiskers twitching like those of a tame rabbit. These curious little rodents become familiar to all who travel at high altitudes in the Himalayas. In shape and size they are rather like small guinea-pigs, but the fur is very long and soft and the colour is a bright rufous brown. They live in holes and crannies on the hill-sides, usually amongst rocks, and are often very tame and confiding, provided that one is careful not to alarm them with any sudden movement. Their usual range is at an altitude of 9000 to 12,000 feet, but I have met one nearly as low as 7500 feet.

During the rest of that march we saw no ibex. Our destination that day was the rest-house of Jispar, but before Jispar the road passes through the village of Kolong. This is the home of the Thakur family, which now holds the lordship or waziri of

Lahul under the British Government, and the ruins of their ancient castle may be seen in a dominating position by the road. The residence of the family is higher up on the hill-side, in a position invisible from the road. On another occasion Thakur Abhai Chand was kind enough to invite me up to his home, which is one of the largest and oldest houses of Lahul, though it does not possess any special feature like the Tower of Gondla. We had tea on that occasion in a large upper guest-chamber, the beams and pillars of which were beautifully carved and painted, while the walls were painted with emblems significant of the different attributes of the creator. The chapel in this house was remarkable for the excellence of the mural paintings, and one of these was from the hand of Thakur Mangal Chand, who is himself highly skilled in the canons of Buddhist art. In the chapel are preserved some arms and chain armour and a number of ancient round bucklers of rhinoceros hide ; it would be interesting to learn the source of these last, but they doubtless came through Tibet.

On the plateau on which stands the Thakur's house there is an ancient tower which looks down upon the road, and this appears to be a remnant of a large castle which is said to have been burned by invaders from the north. The walls of the tower are of the same layers of stone and wood that we saw at Gondla, and I was much struck by the manner in which the woodwork had withstood the ravages of time. Close to the ruin are a large group of chortens that commemorate the Thakurs and their kin, and here also are some of the large incised figures on stone which tradition attributes to the supposed prehistoric race of giants.

There is a pleasant little rest-house at Jispar at the edge of the Juniper Forest, which here stretches down over some level ground right to the edge of the Bhaga. Close to the house is a small shrine beneath a

juniper-tree, which is decked with the horns of ibex and sheep, and hung all over with tattered shreds of cloth and the remains of prayer-flags. The flat ground and the rough stone serais erected by Government form a favourite camping-ground for nomads and traders moving along the valley, and on the rare occasions that the rest-house is tenanted some of them are apt to come up to it for medicine or other help. On this particular occasion four traders came across to the bungalow, and pushing forward one of their number asked me if I could rid him of a leech. I asked for details, and they said that a leech had entered his nose about a fortnight previously, as he had been drinking from a spring. All the usual remedies had been tried to dislodge the intruder, but with no effect, and in addition to the intense discomfort involved the man was afraid that the leech would ultimately eat into his brain. I was rather puzzled what to do in the matter and invited suggestions from the various members of the camp, who, of course, had joined the consultation. Numerous suggestions were made, but each of the well-known remedies had already been tried by the sufferer. At last my cook suggested that the man should draw up into his nose the water from a *huqquah*—a foul mess of nicotine and fumes that, personally, I should have dreaded more than any leech. This was, however, acclaimed as a good suggestion, and it was tried forthwith, my cook's *huqquah* providing the necessary poison. We will draw a veil over the subsequent proceedings; but suffice it to say that the leech lost no time in leaving its quarters, and we soon saw it writhing on the ground, a loathsome black object, which must have completely blocked up the man's nose.

Next day we were on the look-out for ibex during the whole march, as the nullahs about the road were all likely to hold them. Some three or four miles above Jispar the Zanskar river joins the Bhaga, as well as

another smaller stream, and this fertile open piece of the valley, known as Darcha or Sumdeo, contains the last villages and the last cultivation of Lahul. Just before the Darcha bridge is reached the road leads over a huge landslide, which projects right into the bed of the rivers, a tangled mass of mighty splinters of rock which most clearly came from a great scar on the mountain above. Tradition relates that a whole village lies overwhelmed underneath this spot. There was one survivor, who was blown out of the village by the shock and thrown across the Bhaga to the flowery slope opposite. Where he fell there he built a new home, which his descendants occupy to the present day !

Beyond Darcha the road gradually rises to Patseo, where the last of the rest-houses is built at an altitude of 12,500 feet. With Darcha we left the Juniper Forest behind, and tree-growth became confined to a few small patches of birch, which grew in sheltered screees high up on the mountain-sides. Low drifts of snow became more frequent, lying here and there on the northern slopes across the valley, until a few miles from Patseo we came across the last of the snow bridges, still *in situ*, though cracking and unsafe, spanning the rough torrent of the river in its headlong course.

As we marched we scanned the frowning hill-sides for ibex, but for many miles in vain, until at last Moti Ram announced that he had seen some. He took my glasses and confirmed the discovery, and I dismounted forthwith. We were opposite to a deep rounded nullah, which here scarred the huge mass of the mountains on the left bank of the Bhaga. At the head of the nullah was a snow-field and glacier which fed the small stream that dropped down from it into the Bhaga, but the snow ended about half way down, and the bottom half of the nullah was bare. Here the ibex were feeding below the end of the line



(Upper) STRIKING CAMP IN THE UPPER CHANDRA VALLEY  
(Lower) SNOW BRIDGE AT 14,000 FEET, CHANDRA VALLEY



of snow, and it would have been quite impossible to have approached them from beneath. On each side the nullah was bounded by very sheer ground, difficult and in places dangerous, forming buttresses, which hedged the nullah in as with a doorway. From our position, looking straight into the nullah, the ibex were on the left-hand slope, and so far as we could tell through the glasses it would be possible to climb up the buttress to the left of the entrance and move across it ; this should bring us out a little above the animals, which were grazing quietly, apparently indifferent to our presence so far away on the road across the river. I studied the flock for some time through my glasses. There were some fifteen or twenty animals, and I made out that there were several males ; one in particular appeared to carry a very big head, as the tips of his horns ended in the outward sweep which is so seldom seen in ibex.

We consulted together and decided that it was worth attempting a stalk by way of the left buttress, provided we could get across the river. The snow bridge that we had passed could not help us, as it was on the lower side of the nullah, and we could not cross the side stream from the glacier without being discovered by the ibex. So we continued up the road until we had passed the mouth of the nullah and the ibex were out of sight.

The passage of the river was a matter of some difficulty. The water was too cold for a passage on foot to be regarded as a feasible preliminary to a difficult stalk on wind-swept hill-sides, and it was necessary to get the ponies to scramble down the loose slopes of shale and stones to the water's edge ; then when we had reached the water's edge it was no easy matter to urge the ponies through the swift icy torrent, stumbling on the rough boulders of the river-bed. However, we got safely across and scrambled somehow up the opposite bank on to a small stretch of

pasture that divided the sheer hill-side from the river. Here we hobbled the ponies and left them to graze without their bits. Then the climb commenced. The outer slopes of the buttress were very steep. From the opposite side of the river we had marked a spot on the hill-side which it was necessary for us to reach before we started to move round the buttress into the nullah, and this was our objective. No special caution was needed in the climb, as the wind was blowing in our favour, and we were on the reverse side of the buttress to the ibex ; but the ground was as steep as it could well be without becoming a precipice, and it would have afforded a very difficult climb even at sea-level ; whereas we had started at an altitude of 11,000 feet, and had therefore to contend with atmospheric difficulties that shortened our breath and made the heart and lungs seem ready to burst from our throats. It was a long business and a slow business, but at last we reached our appointed mark, and then started to move slowly across the side of the buttress towards the nullah. Here we were almost immediately in difficulties : ground that through the glasses had appeared moderately easy proved on a nearer acquaintance to be very difficult to cross, and there were places where the hillmen had to give me a good deal of assistance. The ground dropped away very sheerly beneath our feet, and we were looking almost straight down on to the side stream that drained the nullah — a situation that always tries my very indifferent head. Also it soon became evident that the buttress was wider and more broken than had appeared from the road, and it was doubtful whether we could arrive in shot of the spot where we had last seen the ibex grazing. However there was nothing for it but to go slowly on, and we were working our way cautiously over the crags when we came to a corner that gave us a view of the edge of the snow-field. The ibex were no longer there, and

it seemed for the moment as if our long and difficult climb had been in vain. We took council for a moment and then Moti Ram crept quietly forward to a crag in front of us, while I settled into a firm position and examined the opposite slopes of the nullah with my glasses. I was satisfied that the quarry was not within my field of vision when Moti Ram's body came into sight, backing cautiously round a corner, and he signed to me to join him. The Thakur and I then crept as best we might up to him, to learn from a whisper that the ibex had apparently winded us, for they were climbing the nullah ahead of us, aiming for the snow-fields. I slipped the sights up and we crawled slowly to the crag and looked over. At first nothing was in sight; then a brown body slowly moved out of a hollow and turned a projecting corner of the hill-side, and then another, and then a third. I slipped the safety catch and waited, with the glasses up to my eyes. Another female followed the first three, and then I saw the sweeping horns of the big male that we had seen. He moved majestically out of the hollow and lingered at the corner, anxious but not yet satisfied of the exact direction from which danger threatened. I knew it was my only chance, for we could see the leading females now advancing up the open slopes towards the glacier, and we knew that the flock would never stop where we should have time for a second stalk that day. Yet the shot would be a very long and difficult one, far longer than I usually care to take. However it was the only chance, so I raised my rifle and, taking aim, fired. As the sound of the report echoed round the nullah the ibex disappeared behind a rock, and for a moment I hoped that I had got him; but then he came into sight again and paused for an instant, broadside on. I aimed again and pulled the trigger, but there was a dull click, and looking down I saw that the empty case had jammed, and while I pulled desperately at it

I watched the whole flock of ibex climb out of the nullah till they were lost to me.

That is the worst of an automatic rifle ; for months it will give the best of results, firing and ejecting with precision, then once in a way an empty case jams in the breech, and chooses the moment when one is opposite some special trophy. The last time that this rifle had let me down was in the Salt range, when luck and a rapid scramble had brought me within fifty yards of a 30-inch Oorial. However, I consoled myself with a taste of sour grapes—the ibex was certainly too far off and the shot would never have hit it ; so with that poor crumb of comfort I addressed myself to the difficult descent back to the river.

We caught up the ponies and, refording the river, resumed our march. Perhaps Diana forgave the secret hope that we should see no more ibex on that march, for at least she granted it, and in due course the weary party reached the desolate spot called Patseo.

My next endeavour to secure an ibex head in Lahul was on the mountains behind Jispar. News was brought in that some good heads of ibex had been seen in that direction by the shepherds and graziers, so it was decided that the Thakur and I should go up to look for them. A couple of small tents were sent up on coolies, with orders to pitch them by a well-known cave which would serve to augment the accommodation in the camp, and in the late afternoon we ourselves walked up through the Juniper Forest searching for the nests of a grosbeak that builds in the juniper-trees. Unfortunately the rain started, and we were well wetted before we reached the camp. I had no change of clothes with me, and there was nothing for it but to go to bed in the early evening, so as to get my garments dried over the fire in the cook's tent. One way and another it was very uncomfortable in the tiny camp, and I was not sorry to go to sleep,

after leaving instructions for an early breakfast. The camp was close to the nullah in which the ibex were believed to be, so there was no need for a very early start. I was awakened at dawn, and it was not long before I was ready to start, fortified by the excellent breakfast that the cook appeared able to produce always, even under the least propitious circumstances.

We started off a party of four: Thakur Abhai Chand, Moti Ram the shikari, another Lahula to carry the haversacks with lunch, and myself. It was first necessary to reconnoitre a range of cliffs which stands sheer up behind the village of Jispar, so we climbed slowly up the hill-side till we reached their brow. From here onwards it was essential to move with the utmost circumspection ; the upper edge of the cliff was broken into small gullies, with the result that there were treacherous currents of air that might easily betray us if any ibex were on the cliff or on the slopes that ran up to it. The lie of the ground was such that it was difficult to see below, and this entailed an examination of the spot from several points of view. However, if the ibex were there, we should start by being above them, and this is always a great advantage with hill game, which seem to watch the levels and the lower ground and to be much less apprehensive of danger from above. Slowly and by sections we examined the range and were at last satisfied that there were no ibex on it, though it was reported to be a favourite feeding-ground. Then we moved higher up the mountain and examined some rocky slopes that led up to a small peak on the right, where drifts of snow were still lying amongst the pastures. This, too, proved a blank, so we crossed left-handed to the crest of some rolling downs that overhung an enormous nullah. Cautiously we crawled up to the edge and, lying amongst some rocks, commenced to spy the opposite slopes of the nullah. I was carefully examining a side

ravine through the glasses when a satisfied grunt from Moti Ram told me that he had seen something. He pointed slowly to a rock-strewn slope opposite to us, far away across the wide mouth of the nullah. I gazed and gazed at it until one of the brown rocks moved, and I saw that it was an ibex. Then another moved, and I got on to them with the glasses, which each man borrowed in turn. It then became clear that the ibex were prepared for the midday rest. Ibex, like other hill game, chiefly graze in the early morning until about ten o'clock, and again in the late afternoon, from about three o'clock, and it is their usual custom, if not disturbed, to rest in some secluded spot during the midday hours. We made out at length that the party before us consisted of seven males, and that all had good heads. They were on a grassy slope, strewn with rocks, which lay like an amphitheatre at the foot of a small cliff, high up on the far side of the huge nullah that lay beneath us. It was very pleasant lying there in the sunlight in the bracing air, watching the seven fine beasts through the glasses. The distance was too great to allow of any accurate estimate of the heads, but it was clear from their shape and sweep that all were fit to shoot and well over the minimum size of thirty-two inches laid down by the game rules. One ibex was the patriarch of the party, and his paler colour and larger size were clearly evident through the glasses, but I could not satisfy myself as to which bore the finest head. They moved along, now cropping the grass, now looking round, but their progress grew slower and slower, and first one and then another lay down, only to rise again and graze a few more paces. It soon became evident that they had fixed on the slope for their siesta, and at length they settled there, drowsing in the warmth of the sun.

Even these lords of the mountain could scarce have known a finer view. The spot on which they lay

looked straight out over the Bhaga Valley and Jispar, 2000 feet and more below their feet. From their left stretched the great cañons of the side nullah, which fell steeply down to join the Bhaga, its sides carved into an infinite variety of cliff and slope and terrace. The Bhaga river lay like a silver ribbon below, meandering slowly amidst its banks and shoals of shingle. On the nearer bank lay houses, and fields green with the first blades of barley—a carpet broken by the dull shades of the juniper-trees and the brighter tints of willow and poplar. Through them all ran the road, dull counterpart of the silver river; while for background, close across the river, rose the sheer mass of the mountains of Lahul, snow-field and peak and glacier rising up to touch the blue and cloudless sky.

There was only one means of approaching the ibex from the spot where we lay, and that was to move up the hill-side towards the head of the big nullah, and crossing wherever feasible out of sight of the party to come down the opposite spur over on top of them. This would entail much time and hard work, so we started at once. At first it was a simple matter : we had merely to shuffle back behind the skyline and then walk up the reverse slopes of the ridge, and this we did. But higher up we found a small patch of ground to be crossed which would bring us within sight of the ibex.

I decided to risk crossing this patch without concealment. We were at least half-a-mile from the ibex and the great gorge divided the spur on which we were climbing from the spur on which they lay. We were heading apparently in the opposite direction, and there seemed no reason why the ibex should not consider us some of the shepherds whom they are accustomed to see on the hills. But this was a grave mistake ; for no sooner had we crossed the little patch of hill-side and halted to look cautiously through the

glasses than we discovered that the party of ibex had at once got up and were moving away along their ridge. We watched them till they rounded the corner, walking slowly without any signs of fear. Then followed a consultation. The shikaris, who knew the ground, stated that the lie of the country beyond the ridge was such that the ibex were not likely to go far, and that if we continued with our original plan we should soon pick them up again on the hill-sides below the farther ridge. So we continued to move up towards the head of the nullah. The ground here was clothed with short grass, covered in places with masses of broken rock and debris, and it was intersected with screes of shale and the remains of old landslips. The snow had practically all melted. Just before we started to cross the nullah we came across a number of snowcock, which stood about on the rocks looking at us, or walked slowly up the slopes of shale, the loose stones rolling down from under their feet. We were careful not to disturb them, as the sight and sound of these giant birds flying down the hill-sides, with their alarm note of "quick, quick," has saved many a fine trophy from the hunter.

It was wearisome work climbing out of the far side of the nullah, but at last we found ourselves on the ridge for which we were aiming, and it was a pleasant relief to move down along it to the end below which we had last seen the ibex. The ridge ended abruptly in a mass of frowning cliffs and steep corries which overhung the Bhaga Valley in a drop of some 2000 feet. We halted in a grassy hollow at the end of the ridge, and there had a short rest in preparation for a possible stalk. Our breath regained, we started very cautiously to reconnoitre the ground below us. This was not difficult, owing to the abruptness with which the ridge ended in cliffs and the mighty rocks that bordered all the edge. We moved with care along the edge, scanning every corrie in turn. At last we found

the seven ibex. We had clambered out, as it were, on to the crenellated battlements of a lofty tower, along a line of rock that hung over the sheer face of the cliff, and there we saw them straight beneath us. They were resting, all unsuspecting, on a grassy slope which lay steep and isolated amongst the rugged cliffs. Two of the animals were nibbling the short turf, the others sat drowsing. I could not pretend to estimate the distance, so straight below us were the animals, but it would have been a very long shot, and I did not feel inclined to risk it, as the shikaris desired. We sat there for a little time, edging back from the crag and out of sight, examining the ground in hopes of getting nearer. It seemed to me that if we could descend the cliff by a steep corrie that cut through it some distance along, it would then be possible to climb up behind the little ridge on which the ibex lay, in the hope of an easy shot from the crest. It was not an ideal plan, but the ground was so dangerous that the only alternative was the difficult shot from where we lay. I decided to try the detour, though the shikaris were clearly not enamoured of it.

We accordingly crept back on to the grassy headland and moved round in the open to the spot I had selected, and started the descent. It was an unpleasant business: the corrie was much steeper than we had realised from a distance, and the climb down became more and more dangerous. However we persevered with it until we realised that to descend farther would be mere waste of time; for even had we got down without accident, it became evident that we should never be able to climb the reverse side of the spur on which the ibex lay: this had been hidden from us in the beginning, but as soon as it came into sight I knew that it was beyond my power to scale it, with the awful chasm below my feet.

Possibly a bare-footed Lahula, unencumbered by

burdens or imagination, might have found a way up the crags, but that way was not for me. The shikaris agreed that the position was hopeless, so we retraced our steps, and after the waste of nearly an hour's exhausting work once more returned to the grassy headland. We then crept down to the rock and cautiously peered over to see whether the ibex were still on their slope. They had not moved, and I decided to risk a long shot, though the shikaris were made to understand that the odds were great against a successful one.

At this point the Thakur intervened with a suggestion. It was evident that when disturbed by my shot the ibex would move only in one of two directions—they would not descend to the valley, they could hardly climb the cliffs on which we lay—they must either move along to the right to the corrie which we had essayed without success, or they must go back in the direction from which we had disturbed them earlier in the day. Should they take the former course I should probably have the chance of a shot as they climbed across, and it was possible also that I might cut them off with a rapid change of ground. His suggestion was that he might take his rifle back and make an endeavour to hit off their road if they retraced their morning's course, in which case I should have no chance of a further shot.

After some consideration I agreed. The plan did not altogether please me from a strictly sporting point of view, as I hold that in this form of shikar there is room for only one man to shoot, but other elements entered into the question. The Thakur was in a sense my host ; his local influence had secured me the chance of ibex at all, and were I to refuse the suggestion he could only attribute my refusal to selfishness and not to sporting canons, which he could hardly be expected to appreciate.

It was arranged that I should allow five minutes

for the other gun to select his position, and I crawled out on to the dizzy crag and settled into a comfortable position. Five minutes is a long time ; it allowed me to study the ground and pick my ibex, and it gave time for heart and wind to recover from the exertion of climbing into position in the rarefied atmosphere of 12,000 feet of altitude.

I could see that all the ibex had quite good heads, but it was difficult to compare and estimate them from my position straight above ; so it seemed best to select the animal which afforded the best target, and I chose one which was lying down in such an attitude that I looked directly along the length of his back. It is not difficult to shoot straight in a perpendicular line ; it is elevation that bothers ; and I had the whole length of this ibex in which to vary, with the consciousness that if I hit him at all he was mine, for the upper view of the length of an animal is almost all a deadly target.

The hands of my watch crawled slowly round and at last the time was up. I raised the rifle slowly and took deliberate aim at the ibex far beneath, aiming at the centre of the back. I have seldom made a cleaner shot. The doomed animal never moved, but with the report of the rifle he just rolled slowly down the slope and caught against a rock and lay there. The other ibex started to their feet and gave a short rush and then stood still, staring from side to side, and trying to locate the danger which neither scent nor eyesight revealed to them. Satisfied that my first target was dead, I shifted my position slightly and fired again, but the angle was difficult and the target small, and there was no apparent hit.

The ibex were loath to move until they had located the danger, but at last they made up their minds and retreated round the corner, and I saw them no more. A little later I heard the Thakur's rifle, and then a second report, and then a third after an interval.

It was quite impossible to get down to my fallen ibex from where we lay, so after a long look at him through the glasses we scrambled off the crag and moved round to find the meaning of the other shots. And there we found my fellow-sportsman jubilant : he had, it appeared, decided to watch a certain gully, and after he had heard my shots the ibex had appeared through it and passed him within easy range. He had fired at the big grey beast we had noted in the party, and had hit it with both shots, knocking it over, but at his approach it had risen again, and a third shot had given the *coup de grâce*.

He also told me that the last ibex to pass appeared to be wounded, as if I had hit it, and we examined the line along which they had passed. After a search amongst the stones we found blood, and this trail led some way, but we eventually lost it.

It was now late in the afternoon and we had a long difficult descent to the rest-house before us, as the coolies had been ordered to strike the camp after our departure in the morning. So we set about securing the heads of the two ibex : this was a difficult job, as they lay far apart on very steep ground. All we could do at the moment was to cut off and secure the two heads, and these were a sufficiently heavy load for one of the shikaris. My head proved to bear a very regular pair of horns, with an equal spread. Those of the old grey ibex were very massive and blunted, but unfortunately one horn was broken off at the tip, spoiling the symmetry of the head.

The skins were not worth preserving, for, as is so often the case, we had killed the animals at the season of the shedding of the winter coat, and the hair was coming out in handfuls.

Time was pressing, so we hastily hid one carcass under a mass of stones to protect it from the vultures till it could be fetched next day, and the other we were able to drag and roll to the beginning of the

valley, from where it was brought in that night. Then at length, after a long and difficult descent, we reached the rest-house, weary but well satisfied with the day's shoot.

Next morning news came in that a shepherd had seen the third ibex going up the valley in sad straits, beyond the spot where we had lost the blood trail, and from the flight of vultures in that direction we felt satisfied that its sufferings were not prolonged. I could not myself wait to search for it, as my dates had all been planned out for a dozen marches ahead, but the Thakur kindly promised to arrange to secure the horns for me, and some time afterwards he sent me a head which was picked up in the direction of the lost ibex. Vultures and foxes had cleaned the flesh, but it was evidently a fresh head, and was very likely that of the animal I had wounded. I should like to feel certain it was mine, for the horns are very fine ones, with a length of forty-six inches, and that is, so far as I know, the record for Lahul.

## CHAPTER VI

### PATSEO AND ITS FAIR

DURING my wanderings in Kulu and Lahul the name of the Patseo Fair had become very familiar to me. Mention of it was always cropping up in every sort of connection, and my curiosity had been aroused concerning what was obviously a very important item in the life of the people of Lahul. So when I heard that we should reach Patseo during the continuance of the fair the news was welcome. A great interest attaches to fairs in general anywhere in the world, as the majority of them are survivals in some shape or form from earlier days, and furnish many an interesting sidelight on the manner in which our ancestors lived ; while the more primitive the people and remote the tract in which a fair is held the more instructive it is as to the ways of the past.

Patseo is situated at an elevation of about 12,500 feet above the sea, at the junction of two valleys at the foot of the Baralacha range. Viewed from the small area that forms the fair ground the two valleys appear of almost equal importance ; but in reality one valley is short and leads to nowhere save the glacier to which its origin is due ; while the other is the valley of the Bhaga river, which rises only ten miles away in the Suraj Dal, on the summit of the Baralacha Pass.

Patseo is said to be a Kulu word for a stone bridge, and the Tibetan name for the place, Dozum, has the same significance ; and the presence of some ancient bridge, now replaced by the slight wooden structure shown in the illustration, affording easy access to the



(Upper) A SALT-TRADER'S CAMP ON THE LINGTI PLAIN

(Lower) THE BRIDGE OF PATSEO, 12,500 FEET



grazing grounds on the hill-sides around, may well explain the site of the fair. The modern Lahula will, however, declare that the fair takes place at Patseo as the lowest spot to which it is safe for the Tibetans and their sheep to descend in summer. The fertile slopes about Darcha (10,000 feet), some few miles down the Bhaga Valley, are too hot for them. Now Darcha contains the last villages of Lahul, and from there, past Patseo, right away over the Baralacha range to the Tsarab river, the country is quite uninhabited. It is obvious that the fair, which attracts enormous numbers of sheep, could not be held in the neighbourhood of any village where the grazing runs were already occupied, and Patseo is the first convenient place after the inhabited area. A mixture of these various reasons probably led to the establishment of the fair on this desolate site, which at first acquaintance looks so unsuited to it.

Patseo itself is cold and bleak to a degree ; on all sides the mountains rise bare and forbidding, now in grassy slopes, now in banks of shale, here and there breaking into rocky precipices. Glaciers fill the heads of many of the ravines, and snow crowns the summits, lying in sheltered ground in long drifts that reach well into the valleys. I have seen snow still lying against the rest-house verandah in July. Marching up from Darcha one has watched the Juniper Forest of Kyelang and Jispar dwindle and end in scattered stunted trees, and even the birch clumps have failed before Patseo is reached. One last clump of six straggling trees shelter in a small scree higher up the valley, and give the traveller his last view of tree-growth for all the weary miles that lead to the frontier of British territory.

The Public Works Department rest-house at Patseo is a two-roomed building, with a verandah in front ; a small cook-house and a square serai for native travellers are built near by. It is situated on the high

ground above the Bhaga river, which here runs through a deep gorge. Across the river stands another serai beside the road, in the semicircle of some mounds that block the valley and on the far side cause the formation of a deep tank.

It was late in the afternoon as we rode up the valley and neared Patseo. The presence of the fair was advertised by various flocks of sheep resting or grazing on the hill-sides about the road, and by a few parties of Lahulas with loaded pack animals, who were marching away after completing their trading. Then as we reached the small serai numbers of tents and shelters were visible, and we found a busy scene in front of us ; but it had best be viewed as I saw it after a cup of tea had brought back contentment to my soul and inspired a desire to go round and view the camps.

To the right of the rest-house there was a comparatively large stretch of level ground. This was the site of the main camp of the traders from Rupshu, who needed room to stall their sheep at night ; in the day they drove them forth to graze on the hill-sides. The tiny tents were all pitched in a row, and by each were stacked the sheep packs, forming a low wall, in the centre of which the sheep were tied at night. Long ropes were pegged down to the ground, and to these the sheep were tethered by the cord and peg which are always to be seen round their necks. These little camps are set out in this fashion wherever one meets them on the road from Ladakh. Some of the packs were also stacked about the tents to keep off the wind, while bales of wool awaiting sale made a luxurious couch for the owners.

A glimpse within one of the tents disclosed an indescribable confusion of cooking-pots, foodstuffs, ragged garments and the like, in the midst of which two or three men were squatting around a fire, the smoke of which was out of all proportion to its size. Fuel is

scarce in these parts, and probably the evening meal was being cooked over dry sheep-dung. The owners of the tents had come from Rupshu, the Tibetan province of Kashmir, and they were dressed in the long robe and greasy wool-lined cap common to Spiti, Ladakh and Western Tibet. Amongst them were a few lamas with cropped heads and dirty red frocks.

At one side of the Rupshu camp were a party of Kampas, the curious nomads of Tibetan origin, who wander far afield, even to the edge of the Punjab plains, earning a living in various devious ways, of which the most prominent is begging. These Kampas must have intended to stay at Patseo longer than most of the traders, for their very exiguous tents were built up with walls of stones and piles of brush-wood—gathered far afield on the hills—till quite a miniature village had been formed.

A burly individual came up with a salaam and was introduced as the Lombardar of the Khanabadosh—the gipsy headman—while a whisper informed me that he was a man of substance. A man of substance he certainly was, but not quite in the way that my informant meant, though a heavy gold earring and his general attire showed that his wandering life was not without profit. A swarm of children and a few women had also emerged from the tents. The latter were clothed in long loose gowns, girt about the waist ; their heads were bare, with the hair parted down the centre and tied back into a pigtail ; while their round flat Mongolian faces were plastered with some black substance, to avert the notice of the gods, who look on human beauty with an envious eye.

Our friend the Lombardar himself sported a magnificent pigtail, and a little conversation soon showed that he was not ignorant of English and the ways of cities—a disappointment akin to the discovery of the ticket of a Calcutta firm in a curious furred head-dress that I had considered peculiar to Lahul !

We left the Kampas and crossed the bridge to the far side of the Bhaga ; there on a grassy plain, intersected with runnels of water, were a large number of tents, partly of Kampas, partly of the wool traders. All were busy with the preparation of the evening meal, but a few men found time to run out and salaam and exchange a word or two with my interpreter. We traversed the camp with a wary eye on the savage dogs which lay sleeping amongst the tents, and passed on to a Bashiri encampment.

These men of Bashir greatly resembled the Lahulas, and, like them, were clothed in good brown homespun, neat to look upon and serviceable to wear. But the heart of a dandy can beat beneath homespun as well as under silk and satin, for many wore buttons made from silver coins, and more than one bright necklace of coral or pebble met the eye. Traders and men of substance are these Bashiris, and they had marched many long stages to barter wool and grain.

The circuit at last brought us to the serai by the roadside ; here the rooms of the serai and the tents around it revealed a miscellaneous crowd, of whom easily the most striking was a Ladakhi woman. Burnt and tanned by the fierce seasons of Ladakh, she was hideous in the extreme in features, but her long brown gown and trousers formed an effective background to the silver utensils and ornaments that hung from the girdle at her waist and to the huge rough goatskin cloak, with its long hair. On her head was the berak, with its red serge and massive lumps of turquoise, while the black lappets of fur and cloth stood out beside her cheeks. These curious lappets are said to owe their origin to the flattery of courtiers. The story is that a bygone Queen of Ladakh was a martyr to toothache, and none could cure her, until a physician wiser than his fellows told the exalted lady that the trouble was due to the wind. He ordered her to wear a screen on each



(Upper) GADDI DANCERS AT A HILL FAIR

(Lower) A FAMILY OF GADDI SHEPHERDS



side of her face. The Court with one accord declared the new device vastly to become the Royal face, and the ladies without delay copied their mistress. The toothache departed and the fashion remained.

We turned from the Ladakhi lady and, in contrast, saw a young Lahula nun going to draw water from the stream for her father's tent ; her comely youth was marred by the close-cropped hair and plain brown dress of her order.

Across the road a group of Gaddi shepherds from Chamba were eating a meal. They had come down from the mountains to purchase the coarse Tibetan salt for the flocks, which others of their number were tending. It is a curious life that these men live, wandering year in year out from the foothills to the borders of Tibet, through the circle of the grazing rights assigned to them by inheritance. Tradition gives the Gaddis an origin from the plains, whence they fled from persecution, and in physique and looks they are quite different from the ordinary hill-folk. Their dress is very distinctive : yards of black goat-hair rope are wound round the waist over a loose garment, half coat, half shirt, of thick white homespun, whose ample skirts stick out like a stiff kilt over the bare legs ; a huge turban and a check blanket complete the turn-out, unless, as is often the case, two or three lambs and kids are peeping out of the loose folds of cloth above the girdle.

These Gaddis are great dancers. At their fairs big drums are erected from a line of poles, and a Gaddi takes his station before each drum, beating it with a couple of short staves, and bowing and pirouetting madly between the strokes. The women accompany their lords to the grazing grounds, sleeping on the open hill-side and carrying their full share of the heavy packs of blankets and provisions.

We halted a moment to watch a trader preparing his newly purchased wool for transport. Two men

were twisting the wool into long ropes, which were then coiled and tied into bundles, to be loaded on to the sheep that had brought up grain for sale at the fair.

By this time dusk had fallen, and we returned to the shelter of the rest-house.

The Patseo Fair takes place annually in July and August, and lasts for somewhat over a month. The trade there is mainly by barter, but the Tibetans like the British silver rupee, and the Lahulas pay for a certain amount of their purchases in cash. The contrary would appear to be almost unknown, as when I desired to see Tibetan money they informed me that practically none was brought down. They have no need of money on the road, for they bring their own provisions for the journey, which lies almost entirely through uninhabited country.

The staple articles at the fair are wool, barley and wheat, salt and borax. The charas from Ladakh and the green tea, sugar and piece-goods from India, that form a considerable part of the trade between the two countries, appear to be carried direct by mule caravans owned by the merchants of Hoshiarpur and Kulu, without connection with the Patseo Fair, though they necessarily pass by that place.

Salt and borax are brought from Ladakh sewn in neat little saddle-bags that are carried by the "biangis," or Tibetan sheep. These biangis are larger in the body and grow longer wool than the sheep of Lahul, and their long legs and small heads give them a curious appearance. They travel down unshorn, and the wool is clipped and sold at the fair by the fleece and not by weight.

The Lahulas bring up their grain in similar saddle-bags on their own flocks, and there is usually an understanding that the Lahula shall purchase his wool and salt from the Tibetan who has bought his grain, the two accounts being set against each other

and the balance paid in cash. The extensive purchases of wool almost invariably throw the balance of cash payment to be made on the Lahula, who often has to make more than one journey down from Patseo to carry away all the wool that he has bought.

Some of the wool is used in Lahul in the manufacture of clothes and the remainder is exported to Kulu, and much of this finds its way to the factories of Dhariwal and Agra. In addition to the wool purchased at the fair, great quantities of it are brought direct from Tibet by hundreds of Lahulas, who take their flocks up for the winter grazing and return in summer with bales of wool.

When the last bale has changed hands the traders and Kampas depart, and Patseo is deserted. Then the ibex come down from the hills and lick out the salt droppings from the rough stone pens in which it was stored by the traders during the fair.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BARALACHA PASS

WITH the last rest-house at Patseo ends the part of Lahul that is commonly visited by Europeans. Up to Patseo, with the exception of the Rhotang Pass, the traveller experiences but little more difficulty than in the Outer Himalayas, provided that he is physically able to stand the great altitude. And this is a factor which has to be reckoned with. For anyone with weakness of the heart a visit to Lahul is a serious matter, and even the healthiest may feel the altitude.

On my first visit to the country the effects of the altitude worried me a good deal, especially in bed at night, and at times the palpitation of m heart became so marked that it nearly compelled a return to lower levels ; then I suddenly became acclimatised, and the height troubled me no more, save in the usual matter of breathlessness.

But beyond Patseo it is a different matter. Which-ever road is taken from the top of the Pass, and two of the three roads are merely sheep tracks, it is neces-sary to travel for days in a waste of mountains en-tirely uninhabited and barren to the last degree, and to be prepared to depend on one's own resources. For this all arrangements must be made at Kyelang. Jispar is a small place, and nothing can be bought in the villages round ; while Patseo consists only of the rest-house and a couple of serais. There is no village in the vicinity. To begin with, it is useless trying to take mules beyond Patseo, for although the road is good as far as the Tsarab river—they could not travel the

Zanskar or Chandra paths at all—there is not sufficient grazing for them. From Patseo into Ladakh the grass is very meagre, and what there is, is closely cropped by the sheep flocks that incessantly move over the Pass, once it is open. All baggage therefore must be taken either on Lahuli baggage ponies, which can generally find enough to eat on the mountain-sides, or by coolies ; but for every two coolies a third man is required to carry food for the three of them ; and, in any case, a large number of coolies cannot be taken, for it is impossible to change them on the road, and the men who start from Kyelang or Jispar have to go right through till villages are reached in Spiti or Ladakh, and then return again to their homes. All firewood has to be carried with the camp, for no trees will be seen for several marches, and the coolies have the greatest difficulty in finding the dwarfed and creeping bushes, which are barely sufficient even for their small fires.

Tents are essential in these high and bitter wastes, and the hardy Tibetans and Lahulas do not themselves attempt to travel without them. So it will be seen that to move beyond Patseo requires careful forethought and planning, and a cutting down of all baggage to the lowest essentials. It must be remembered, too, that from Patseo onward the road will be on still greater levels than before. Patseo itself is 12,500 feet in altitude, and from Zingzingbar to the Tsarab river or to Spiti one never descends lower than 14,000 feet.

On the first occasion that I crossed the Baralacha we were making for Spiti by the route of the Upper Chandra Valley. It was essential therefore to take coolies, and even with the utmost care and economy of space we could not make the number required for my baggage less than thirty-five. The Thakur of Lahul was with me, and he took another ten coolies ;

so in the end the total camp contained some fifty men and more.

From Patseo the road runs along the side of the Bhaga river, now sadly diminished, and for a mile or two the rise is very slight. Then at the junction, with a side stream from the Zanskar border, the road and river turn right-handed almost at a right angle, and the actual climb to the Pass commences. It is, however, very gradual—a matter of 4000 feet in about eight miles, as the road winds, though as the crow flies the distance is very much shorter.

The summit of the Pass is, from its height and desolation, a bad place to camp, and the descent of the far side is equally long ; it is therefore the custom to halt half way up the ascent at a spot known as Zingzingbar, or even a mile or two farther on. At Zingzingbar is a rough serai of stone, erected by the Government for the use of all and sundry. Here we camped, pitching our tiny tents on a piece of level ground that lies between the serai and the steep slopes that shut it in. During this trip I was using a small single fly-tent of Shouldari pattern, which, with its poles and ropes, formed a load for two coolies. It was just tall enough for me to stand up in the middle. By way of furniture there was a camp-bed and a folding-chair, while an enamelled basin had to do duty as my bath-room. As all my possessions had to be laid out on the floor of the tent, space was somewhat restricted. The chair was used as a table, while I sat on the bed, whether to feed, to transact my official work, or to skin birds ; and if the sun was up I had invariably to wear my sola topee, as the sun's rays beat strongly through the texture of the single fly of canvas. Small wonder that by the end of the trip I regarded that little tent with deep and bitter loathing, and not least of all when we were in the Tibetan wind of Spiti, that covered everything with fine dust. Stifling by day, bitterly cold by night, the

memory of that tent remains with me. On these occasions one pays a further penalty for being a naturalist. The remainder of the camp do their march and bear their burdens with the knowledge that when the camp has been pitched there is little to do save prepare and eat food. But the unfortunate naturalist arrives at the camping-ground only to set to work on the preparation of the specimens collected during the march. Butterflies have to be papered, eggs to be blown ; anything up to a dozen birds need skinning, with perhaps a greasy marmot or two, and labels and diaries have to be written up ; and as far as possible one must finish off the day's takings, as the morrow is certain to bring a further rush of specimens. Often have I sat skinning far into the night, wrapped in rugs and coats, with frozen fingers, sadly envying the rest of the camp their early slumbers.

Next morning we were up betimes to start the baggage off for the crossing of the Pass. The day was bright and clear, and we did not anticipate any particular trouble, as the Ladakhi traders had started to arrive in Lahul, and report said that the Pass was practically clear of snow, along the trade road. We, however, had to leave this road at the summit of the Pass, for our path to Spiti lay to the right along the Upper Chandra Valley. There was no definite information about this route, though we presumed that it also must be free of snow.

The first half of the ascent was very easy. From Patseo to Zingzingbar the road lies on the left bank of the river, but some distance above Zingzingbar it crosses to the right bank. Here a small rough bridge was built formerly for the passage of the river, but at the time of my journeys it had disappeared and the road had been slightly diverted to cross by a convenient snow-drift which lay across the river in a sheltered gully, bridging the rushing waters that

disappeared beneath it. From here onwards until about a mile from the summit the ascent is very gradual. The Bhaga eats its way, sparkling and purling in the sunlight, down a shallow valley ; on either flank rise rugged crests of rock, worn and eaten by the passage of years, and wreathed in snow that covers all the summits and flows in a frozen stream down every little crack and gully. Half-way up their sides the slopes of shale commence, the rotting debris of the crests above, and these flow down from either hand, their junction swallowed in the stream. Splinter and stone, shale and boulder, crest and corrie, all ring their changes on a monotony of brown, relieved only by the dazzling whiteness of the snow and the clouds that float across the sky. The ascent to the Baralacha is one of the most desolate scenes that I shall ever look upon.

We did not take very long to reach the rough shelter hut, which is built less than a mile from the summit of the Pass as a refuge to those in difficulties. A glance within this was sufficient, for it contained several dead sheep, which must have perished from want and exposure in a storm. From this point the ascent became much steeper, and we soon found ourselves amongst drifts of snow, which gradually became denser, until the road was lost to view, and unbroken snow covered the whole side of the Pass.

The morning was now well advanced and the sun was shining brightly in a cloudless sky, so that the glare from the snow became very trying. Luckily my dark glasses were in my pocket as usual, so I put them on and escaped the worst of the glare, while my companions muffled their faces in the ends of their turbans. Moti Ram happened to be carrying the butterfly net, and this he thrust completely over his head, peering out through the green gauze with results satisfactory to himself, if a little amusing to his companions. We climbed up a steep and slippery



(Upper) THE SURAJ DAL (LAKE OF THE SUN) ON THE SUMMIT  
OF THE BARALACHA PASS

(Lower) THE ASCENT TO THE BARALACHA PASS, 16,000 FEET



bank of snow and found ourselves looking upon the Suraj Dal, or Lake of the Sun, which is the source of the Bhaga. On this occasion it was still in the grip of winter, in a pall of ice untidy with lumps of frozen snow and stones and boulders that had rolled down from the slopes around. Later in the year, after the thaw is complete, this little lake is very majestic in its beauty, the deep blue of its icy waters reflecting rock and snow, with the long vista of the peaks as background.

The actual head of the Pass lies beyond the lake, and is in the nature of a rough rolling amphitheatre surrounded by small irregular peaks. There is no single clean-cut defile, such as the mind involuntarily pictures in a typical pass.

This amphitheatre and its guardian peaks were all covered in one sheet of snow, broken only here and there where some stony crest had eaten its way through the slowly melting snow. We knew that the road to Ladakh lay to the left of the lake, for many of my companions had travelled that way in previous years, but the gradual thaw had removed any traces of the caravans that were supposed to have crossed. Our road lay somewhere to the right, but there was no possible sign by which to recognise it.

It was here that we discovered that only one or two men in the whole camp had ever travelled this road to the Chandra Lake, so we sat down and waited for their arrival. They, too, proved to be very doubtful of the actual line to follow, and we had to feel our way along till the contours allowed us to guess at the lie of the Upper Chandra Valley.

Our march soon resolved itself into a weary plodding through heavy snow of the peculiarly trying consistency that is the first result of a commencing thaw. For half-a-dozen steps we would find it pleasant and easy to walk upon, then a soft patch would cause us to plunge heavily in up to the knees,

pulling out again as best we might. This process was very exhausting in itself, apart from the fact that the great elevation made all exertion an effort. The heat of the sun on our backs and the painful glare from the snow added further to the discomfort of the march. And here a word of praise and tribute is due to the Lahula porters, who carried their loads without a word of complaint at the difficulties of the Pass, and were cheerful and ready to do their best under all circumstances.

Memory holds this crossing of the Pass as an unpleasant experience ; it is a confused memory of burning sun and blinding glare, of struggling through deep snow, of continual halts with icy, sodden feet on some patch of rock and stone, and of a gradually lengthening cavalcade. I estimated afterwards that we had taken six hours to travel something like three miles, but there is no doubt that this road has very seldom been traversed so early in the year.

Then the moment came when we rounded the last sloping shoulder and knew that we had conquered the Pass ; but the view was not inspiring for tired men. Before us lay the Upper Chandra Valley, and as far as the eye could reach the snow appeared to be almost continuous. On the left hand ran the Kunzum range, the barrier between Spiti and Lahul, to the right the mighty range that is the backbone of Central Lahul. Every peak and every ridge was covered with deep snow and the glaciers flowed innumerable. No point in view was less than 14,000 feet in altitude and many of the peaks reached 20,000 feet. As a spectacle it was superb, but my weary brain whispered misgivings. What was the road ahead, and should we ever be able to struggle through the valley if the snow was as continuous as it looked ? Would the passes be feasible at all, or would we have to struggle back and recross the Baralacha ? A little ill-luck, a bad storm, anything might spell disaster.

However, there was nothing for it but to move on and hope for the best, and we had at least done with climbing for the moment. We had turned the ridge, and our road ran gradually downwards at a gentle slope over the snowy plain that forms the head of the Chandra Valley. Already we could discern the trickle of snow water that was, within a few miles, to grow into the rapid rush of the Chandra river. There was now no need of a guide ; the valley stretched before us plain for all to see. And as we moved lower there came slight breaks in the snow, which held out promise that the valley might prove to be easier than had appeared from the summit of the Pass. The breaks became larger and more frequent, and patches of sodden, stony ground began to appear.

We were within less than a mile of the spot which is marked on the maps as the camping-ground of Dogpo Gongma, which is recognisable only when free from snow by the old remains of camp fires, when we reached a small stretch of level sandy ground free from snow. This looked like a fairly suitable spot for a camp, so we decided to profit by the opportunity and halt for the night. We signalled to the coolies to turn aside from their line down the valley, and the order was obeyed with alacrity, the sight of immediate relief lending speed to weary legs. In a very short time we had run up the tents and anchored them with boulders, and the various packs were opened out. The coolies built themselves shelters behind some low banks that kept off the icy wind. Fires were lit from our precious little store of wood, and the prospect of warm food and drink gave cheer to all. But viewed dispassionately, it was a cheerless spot. Rock and stone, snow and ice, composed the view, and through it all ran little streams of snow water. No blade of grass or plant was visible, and no man might gather as much as a handful of any sort of fuel. Beside ourselves the only living things in

sight were a few horned larks and Brandt's mountain-finches, which called and flitted about the outskirts of the camp, careless of our intrusion on the feeding-grounds so newly open to them.

Several of the camp were in a bad way. The Thakur and my munshi and various coolies were suffering the agonies of snow-blindness ; swollen lids and watering eyes kept them awake all night, for time and rest seem the only cure for this painful complaint. One servant was so exhausted that he had to be dosed with brandy and warm tea, and, as someone remarked, his whole appearance was changed. A coolie had chosen this auspicious moment to develop mumps, and this complaint dogged the camp during the whole trip, selecting a victim at intervals. Glasses had saved me from snow-blindness, but my whole face was scorched as in a furnace, and was very sore until the burnt skin turned brown and peeled off some days later.

The sun slowly sank behind the peaks, and we were glad enough to escape the icy cold and sharp wind by hurrying over our food and getting into bed. Bird-stuffing was somewhat neglected that night, for I had developed a very severe headache at the base of the skull, doubtless as a result of the altitude. Our camp was pitched, roughly, at 15,000 feet, and we had been a good deal higher during the day.

The passage of the Baralacha is not usually so difficult as in the instance described above, for the majority of travellers do not attempt to cross until a month later, when the snow has almost completely melted off the summit of the Pass. At such a time the scene is very different. The Suraj Dal lies faintly rippled by the wind, between great slopes of shale, so loose in texture that it is a matter of difficulty to climb them, as the stones slide down beneath one's feet. The trade road winds round to the left of the lake, banked up with low containing walls to hold

back the ever-encroaching shale. The amphitheatre of the Pass becomes a waste of moor-like ground, sodden with snow water and covered with stones, amongst which scanty grass and minute plants of stone-crop give an appearance of vegetation. The snow lies here and there in scanty patches on the hill-sides with a curious streaked appearance. This is the period of the monsoon in the Outer Himalayas, and the Baralacha then reflects its influence with dull days of driving sleet and mist and biting wind, which give no temptation for man or beast to linger on the Pass. They hurry across the summit and so on down the long incline, eager to reach more sheltered ground.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LINGTI PLAIN

ANYONE who is well acquainted with the Gaddi shepherds of the Duala Dhar range and Chamba soon learns the name of the Lingti Plain, which every Gaddi some time in his lifetime visits with his sheep, to feed them on its renowned pasturage. It lies beyond the Baralacha, half in British territory and half within the boundaries of Ladakh. It had long been my desire to visit Lingti, partly just to see for myself a place of which I had so often heard, and partly because it appears to be the only portion of British territory in which a few pairs of the Tibetan sand-grouse occur and breed.

At last the day came when we crossed the Baralacha and set our faces to the road which leads across Lingti to Leh. The first halting-place on this route is known as Kinlung, at an altitude of between 14,000 and 15,000 feet. On crossing the summit of the Baralacha the road winds down the course of a small river called the Yunnan, which rises on the northern face of the Pass and flows down to meet the Tsarab river, ultimately pouring into the Indus in Ladakh.

With the change of watershed the mountains differed in character from those amongst which we had travelled through Lahul. No longer were we amongst rocky precipice and towering peak and eternal glacier. The mountains here appeared smaller, but that was because we ourselves were 4000 feet higher than we had been along the valleys of the Chandra and Bhaga. The glaciers had ceased and the peaks themselves were softened in character,

worn and twisted strata and rounded crest and flattened ridge taking the place of the clear-cut outlines of Lahul. There was less snow, and long slopes of crumbling shale and debris softened the bases of the peaks. The green Alpine pastures of Lahul were but a memory ; here was a waste of stones, blackened and scorched as if in some mighty conflagration.

For a couple of miles we wound down the ever-widening valley of the Yunnan, until round a corner, formed by a projecting spur, we reached the Yunnan Lake recorded on the maps. To call it a lake is somewhat of an exaggeration. Some small spurs of rock and shale here project into the valley of the Yunnan, narrowing it, and at some period in its history the river has evidently swirled round the base of the spurs, cutting out a shallow depression within their angle. This is filled with a sheet of water, which is separated from the river only by a series of banks of sand and shingle, through which small channels of water flow and keep up the level of the lake. It looks as if it might be an ideal spot for duck to rest during migration, but at the time of my visits the margins of the lake were merely tenanted by a few pairs of the lesser sand-plover and their young, which had evidently been hatched on the sloping ground at the base of the mountains.

From here onwards to Kinlung the river is more restricted in its passage, as the spurs close in, and several great landslides stretch half across the valley. Before the road was built these landslides must have been a wearisome obstacle to the traveller : each is composed of great splinters of rock, angular and jagged, piled one on the other in infinite confusion. Most of these splinters weigh a ton or more apiece, and the interstices between them have not yet been filled by soil and rubble. Baggage animals could never have traversed them, and sheep and men could have gone across only with infinite labour. The

road has, however, been made most successfully by filling in a sort of causeway. Below the Yunnan Lake small patches of grassy turf by the river give promise of the pastures to come.

Kinlung lies beyond the landslides, and consists solely of a comparatively level stretch of grass on which has been built a rough serai of stone, beside a small bridge that carries the road across the Yunnan. It was here that I made my first acquaintance with the marmots for which the Lingti Plain is famous. As I approached the serai some shrill whistles sounded from the hill-side above, and I involuntarily looked up in expectation of seeing snowcock. But there were no snowcock ; the calls proceeded from some marmots sitting at the mouths of their burrows. The local name for the marmot is *pheeah*, and as there is no Urdu equivalent for this, the Lahula always translates it as *jungli kutta*, or wild dog, when pressed to explain what he means. The marmot is, of course, a rodent, and when full grown it rather resembles a large otter in size and shape, the colour being a bright chestnut-brown ; the tail is rather short and stiff, and is jerked violently upwards as the animal sits at the mouth of its hole, uttering the shrill, petulant alarm whistle, ready to dart in at the least sign of danger. They are difficult to secure, as, unless killed stone dead, they invariably get into safety underground ; but there is no point in killing them. The fur is harsh in texture and the skins are so full of grease that it is a matter of the utmost difficulty to scrape them clean for preservation. It is difficult to understand how these large animals contrive to secure sufficient nourishment in the barren places where they live.

Just below Kinlung, across the river, a number of little rocky hillocks divide up the valley and cause the formation of several ponds. These I found to contain small fish, coloured with dark spots, which

proved to belong to a genus found only at these great altitudes. A little farther on I was astonished to see a party of duck swimming in the river, and investigation revealed that this was composed of an old hen goosander with a brood of half-grown ducklings. These handsome duck breed sparingly at high altitudes all along the Himalayas.

Here we turned a corner in the valley and found ourselves at the commencement of the Lingti Plain. "Plain" is rather a misnomer, like so many names in the Himalayas, for Lingti is only a plain in comparison with the mountains around. For a space of about ten miles the valley opens out to a width varying from half-a-mile to three or four miles ; in places the floor of this valley is level, but the major portion of it is in slopes, which vary in incidence according to the side nullahs that open out on to it. A large area of the plain has been eaten away by the Yunnan river, which flows in a deep cutting, several hundred yards wide in places, rather to the west of the central line ; it is here quite a wide river, with broad margins of shingle, and its bed lies a couple of hundred feet below the level of the plain.

For the first mile we travelled through a series of curious dunes and hillocks, and I could not resist the conclusion that these were due to the excavations of unnumbered generations of marmots. Then the ground became more level, and we marched along a stony stretch, bisected with the shallow beds of torrents, now bare of water. The character of the ground slowly changed until I realised that we were marching on flat, sandy ground, sparsely covered with grass ; and for some inscrutable reason this was free of stones—a change that seemed unbelievable after the wealth of stone and boulder, pebble and crumbled rock, over which we had marched for long and weary stages. The precise significance of this unexpected change is not clear to me, but I suspect

that it means that the Lingti Plain was once the bed of a lake comparable to the Tso Morari, and this seems confirmed by the alkaline character of the soil towards the lower end of the valley between Sarchu and the Tsarab river.

There is a tradition that there was once a village and cultivation to the west of the Yunnan river, and this was substantiated by the remains of a row of large chortens which could be seen across the river as we marched. Probably the village was destroyed in some Tartar invasion, or else the situation proved too terrible in winter. At any rate now the marmot and the snowcock reign supreme all through the long days of snow and frost, and Lingti knows no other inhabitants than the caravans of shepherds and traders who pass through in summer, travelling with merchandise, or linger awhile for the grazing.

There is a famous landmark on Lingti known as the Phalang Danda—words which apparently mean the Great Stone. If so, the title is very appropriate, for it is applied to a giant boulder which stands in lonely solitude out on the sandy plain. So firm and so immovable does this appear to be that it has been used as a boundary pillar, one of the Empire's sign-posts, and on the top are carved the symbols "K/B," Kashmere and British—for here we stand on the limit of Empire. And farther down the valley one sees two more boundary pillars, which stand up visible for several miles. These are the handiwork of man—errections of stone and plaster—but they bear the same emblem carved on slabs of slate.

We camped at a small spring which issues from the foot of the cliffs near the Phalang Danda, and after inquiries from a small camp of shepherds who were feeding their flocks on the hill-sides above, I decided to spend the afternoon in looking for the ibex which frequent these Lingti ranges. We had a strenuous climb on to the ridge behind the camp, and this was

very trying at an elevation of 15,000 feet; but although we covered a good deal of the ridge, and searched the neighbourhood carefully with glasses, we could see nothing larger than a snowcock. But ibex were about, as we found their tracks, and a shepherd boy tending a flock of goats and sheep on the mountains told us that he had recently seen a party.

The next day was spent in searching for Tibetan sand-grouse. Taking lunch with us, we traversed the whole of the eastern side of the plain right down to the Tsarab river. Beyond the Phalang Danda the plain becomes rather different in character, the sandy soil and sparse grass giving place to a dead alkaline soil, covered with low dense clumps of what I believe to be called Tibetan furze. Amongst these furze bushes I met for the first time that rare butterfly, the Tibetan Clouded Yellow (*Colias ladakhensis*), a pale greenish yellow form of the familiar Clouded Yellow of England. Unfortunately we had taken no net with us, and I was able to collect (and damage) with my hat only three specimens. This was also the breeding-ground of two interesting birds, the mountain wheat-eat and Hume's short-toed lark, which do not occur in Lahul proper, and some time was spent in securing specimens, as both were species that I had hoped to find on the plain and add to my collection.

Half-way down the plain we came across the stage camping-ground of Sarchu, which is named from the small Sarchu river that emerges from a side nullah and falls into the Yunnan. An attempt has been made to bridge the Sarchu with scupper causeways of stone, but these have been washed away, and we found it necessary to ford the river. There is also here a rough shelter-house for travellers, built down in the bed of the Yunnan. I went down to look at this and found a Lahula camp there of a number of traders, accompanied by one or two women, who were marching up into Rupshu to buy wool. They were

delighted to see their young Thakur, and gave us a very cordial reception.

Across the river, in the territory of Ladakh, we could see a remarkable ridge. The top was, roughly speaking, level, and enormous slopes of shale extended well over half-way up its sides ; but the bare face of the ridge was composed of contorted strata of every colour—red, brown, grey, blue, purple—now standing out in bold arches and bastions, now hollowed out into enormous caves, till it was easy to imagine that we looked towards some castle of the old giants of Lahul.

Towards the end of the plain the Yunnan joins forces with the Tsarab river, which emerges from a long rocky valley and opens out into a maze of channels and banks of shingle, where it meets the lesser river. Ordinarily the rivers can be forded here, and a series of worn paths indicate the site of the ford, but the road turns away to the right and leads for a mile and more up the valley of the Tsarab until it reaches a spot where rocky crags enable the river to be bridged. Here the river cuts its way between two walls of rock. Causeways of stone have been built up on the top of these two crags, and with the aid of a small cantilever on one side the bridge has been thrown across : it is long and narrow and without rails, consisting of rough boards fastened to long beams of wood. A strong wind blows down the defile, and it is no pleasant task to cross the bridge, conscious of the rushing waters far below.

Wind and the texture of the soft conglomerate soil have worn the low cliffs of the Tsarab into a series of fantastic carvings—a foretaste of the still wilder fantasies which we shall meet along the Spiti river.

After examining the bridge we turned back and quartered the plain in hopes of finding the Tibetan sand-grouse. Our endeavours proved to be fruitless, and we were quite unable to find any of these

handsome birds, though they certainly occur and breed there, as a pair with their two half-grown young had been procured for me near Sarchu in the previous year by Mr H. W. Wells, who had gone to Lingti to collect mammals on behalf of the Mammal Survey of India. I believe, however, that I saw a single sand-grouse flying up the Yunnan river towards the summit of the Baralacha.

As we returned towards the camp that night we saw the unusual sight of some horsemen approaching us over the plain, and on closer approach they proved to be a party of Ladakhi Tibetans, who passed by without any apparent interest in our presence in that remote spot.

Close to the camp we passed the place where on our departure in the morning some Tibetans had been encamped with their sheep. They had moved away in our absence, but the site was now being searched by a number of scavengers. Two lammergeiers and some griffon vultures stood about on the ground half gorged, while no less than ten of the great Tibetan ravens, aided by a number of Alpine choughs, were examining every nook and cranny. Presumably when we struck camp next morning these same birds came and examined all the ground where we had been, like Autolycus, pickers-up of unconsidered trifles.

We reached our tents, and after dismissing the Thakur politely to his own shelter, I entered my wretched little Shouldari, to find a specimen of the lovely Güldenstart's redstart lying on one of the boxes. This rare bird is an inhabitant of the zone between 10,000 and 16,000 feet altitude, and it had been my great desire to procure it on this journey : hitherto I had failed to see a specimen. I called for the cook and asked for an explanation. "Oh," said he, "Moti Ram went out with your little gun this afternoon and came back with this bird. I told him that it was perfectly common and that we had seen

it on the marches all the way up from Kulu, and then he suggested throwing it away, in case you should be angry ; but I told him to leave it there, as it had been shot." A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and thus nearly did my cook's acquaintance with the common white-capped redstart lose me a rare and long-desired specimen, obtained by chance. Later on I was able to procure some of these redstarts myself.

On the return journey to Lahul we had nearly reached Kinlung when we were met on the road by some of the porters who had been travelling ahead of us with the news that there were some ibex on the crags which overhung the road. Accounts differed, but they declared that they had seen some seven or eight ibex, including males, and as they spoke they pointed out a female which was visible on a projecting rock against the sky. I sat down on the road and studied her with the glasses. There was no doubt as to her identity. She was standing on the rock lazily looking about her, in complete disdain of our presence on the road. The ibex of Lingti are very little molested. Sportsmen practically never come to this remote area : for those with little money and short leave it is too far to reach ; for those with more of both commodities there are many better hunting-grounds. The Lahula and Western Tibetan travellers along the road are all on business, and have no thought or care for shooting ; while the place is too remote from the haunts of men for the occasional poacher to trouble it.

The goat-like head and short horns were clearly silhouetted against the sky, and I watched them through the glasses until the owner moved slowly from my ken. There was a slight delay while a man went off in search of my rifle, which was with the baggage. This interval I employed in studying the ground, and when the rifle arrived, my plans were ready. It was clear that the ibex had moved across

the crag into a deep-cut chasm which lay behind it. It is usually quite hopeless to approach hill game from below, but in this instance it appeared to be feasible, for the hill-side, which stood sheer above the road, was nearly a precipice. It was, however, a possible climb, and the broken crannies and rocks about the summit would allow a cautious reconnoitring of the chasm in which the ibex were believed to be, and an easy shot if they were in sight.

Such climbs are not greatly to my taste; a few yards from the road and we were out of breath, scrambling slowly and cautiously over patches of turf, ledges of rock and slopes of loose stones. By the time that we were half-way up I was delighted to see that even the Lahulas felt the exertion greatly, for we must by then have been well over 15,000 feet above sea-level. For myself I have seldom been in such distress, with a feeling that my lungs must soon burst out through my ribs. But there was worse to come, for we reached a steep slope of loose shale, and this had somehow to be surmounted. The angle of the hill-side here was very steep, and it would have been easy to start a movement in the shale that might carry us down the hill-side. Somehow we got across it, one by one, and crept up behind the shelter of some masses of disintegrating rock which stood up bold and sheer on the hill-side. This was rather a difficult obstacle to surmount. The rock was too rotten for an attempt to climb it to be possible. To the right lay the slope of shale, too treacherous for us to care to renew its acquaintance. To the left a possible route lay past the shoulders of the rock, but the flaking broken crags and debris-strewn ground were not encouraging companions on the brink of the steep gully that flanked the route. However, we had small choice, and slowly crept round to the left. Extreme caution was necessary here, as the gully appeared to be a part of the ravine into which the ibex had

moved, and we might come upon them or give them our wind at any moment. So I crept round each corner and rock with the utmost deliberation, spying the ground as I went. Suddenly I caught sight of a female ibex, and at the moment she hinted danger and looked towards our direction. We froze instantaneously and remained there for agonising moments, while she stared and stared, at us and around us, but at last she turned her head and nibbled at a tuft of grass. Then she moved slightly, and Moti Ram and I pressed back into a corner of the rock. It was the moment for a rapid decision, as we were less than fifty yards from the animal we had seen, and presumably the others reported by the coolies were somewhere beside her. I pulled down the sights of the rifle to fifty yards, opened the safety catch and wormed myself round the corner, ready to shoot. There were the ibex forty yards away, feeding on a grassy patch—one of the easiest chances that I shall ever have—two of them, two females ! And as I lay and panted, watching them climb the corrie and disappear over the crest, I cursed the inventive powers of the Lahula coolie, his powers of multiplication, and the sweeping horns of his imagination. But such is life and such is sport, and the pangs of regret were soon swallowed up in the infinitely unpleasant job of climbing down again to the roadside, a thousand feet below.

A low and broken cliff seemed to touch a chord of memory in Moti Ram, for he enlivened the descent with the story of a recent encounter with a snow leopard that he had found resting in a hollow in some rocks. Always had it been his desire to meet a snow leopard and many his dreams of how he would behave on that auspicious occasion—the time, the place and the opportunity, the gun in his hands, they all coincided. But the great cat looked at him with eyes like saucers, and somehow Moti Ram had felt that life

held greater possibilities—an honest and ingenuous youth!

As we climbed the slopes towards the Baralacha I looked back. Lingti had vanished in the turns of the valley, but I could see, framed in the gap between two mountains, the Lankarghar, a great cathedral-shaped mass of rock that broods on the hills in Ladakh, beyond the Tsarab river. It is a landmark for the caravans, and so it remains in my mind, the central spire towering over the massive aisles and dominating all the hills.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE UPPER CHANDRA VALLEY

IN Chapter VII. I have already described our march over the Baralacha Pass in snow, and the end of that chapter left us encamped a little above Dogpo Gongma, in the Upper Chandra Valley. The usual stages down the valley from this spot are Dogpo Yogma, the Chandra Lake, Karcha, Futtı Runı and Chatru, which are marked on most maps and given in the itineraries. But it must be understood that these names are merely given to spots in the valley which are known to the Gaddi shepherds as suitable places to camp, from circumstances of grass and water and the usual length of a day's march. There is nothing to mark them, for the whole of the country traversed in these marches is entirely uninhabited. From Chatru the routes diverge : one continues down the banks of the Chandra and arrives at Koksar, where it joins the trade road from the Rhotang Pass ; the second turns up a side valley and crosses the great Humpta Pass, 15,000 feet, whence two short marches down the Humpta nullah bring the traveller out at Juggutsukh, in the valley of the Beas. There is, of course, no road of any kind in the area that I have described above ; but the inherited experience of shepherds and Bigaris has marked out the shortest way down the valleys, and this is to some extent shown by the sheep tracks, which tend to converge at certain points.

The march from Dogpo Gongma to Dogpo Yogma proved to be an easy one. As we moved down the slopes into the more sheltered portion of the valley

the snow grew less and less, until we were moving over ground on which it was merely collected into frozen drifts, and grass and moss softened the vigour of the stony slopes, growing here and there in marshy patches at the bottom of the valley. On this ground the horned larks became numerous, feeding amongst the stones, and courting or prosecuting their habitual squabbles with the mountain finches. Inclement though the season, and largely unmelted the snow, I soon discovered that these fine larks were breeding, and some ten or twelve of their nests were found with eggs or young in the course of this and succeeding marches. The pairs were not shy, and it was easy enough, with glasses, to watch them to their nests, built in the open against stones or tufts of grass.

A mile or so below Dogpo Gongma we found our road barred by one of the deep and swift side torrents which fall from the Kunzum ridge into the Chandra, and are some of the obstacles to be encountered along this line of march. But a detour up the nullah enabled us to cross by a snow bridge, and saved us the delay and trouble of fording the icy torrent, which would have been no light matter for the baggage coolies. These snow bridges are frozen drifts of snow, which lie in a solid block across the nullahs, remnants of the pall of snow that covers the whole country in winter. The water flows under them, gradually eating away the under surface, until the day comes that the mass caves in under the united efforts of sun and water, and is washed away. It is always, of course, very advisable to make sure that a snow bridge is still firm and solid enough to allow of the passage of the loaded coolies, and, all being well, they are very useful to the traveller.

For the whole of the march the contours of the valley were very easy and gentle, and the drifts of snow grew less and less till we reached Dogpo Yogma and pitched our camp on the sandy stretch of ground

that bears that name, close to some marshy pools, where we renewed our acquaintance with the lovely Hodgson's wagtail of Sissoo and Gondla.

Here we were surprised to find some sheep and a small party of Gaddi shepherds who were travelling up the valley from Koksar, and stealing a march on their less hardy rivals in the race for the best grazing grounds. We exchanged news and, for our part, were glad to learn that the snow had largely gone from the road ahead of us. Our account to them of the snow on the Baralacha was hardly as encouraging.

This camping-ground is situated on the bank of a second side torrent, but it was not any trouble to cross next morning, as we were able again to profit by a snow bridge ; it was, however, badly cracked, and could have lasted only for a very few more days.

The march to the Chandra Tal proved to be very wearisome. At first we encountered a series of very steep slopes encased in frozen snow, in which steps had to be hacked out with a snow-axe, though one or two of the more venturesome coolies boldly toboganned with their loads down into the valley in search of better ground below. For now we were steadily leaving the bank of the Chandra and mounting on to the side plateaux which represent the original bed of the valley through which the Chandra has eaten its course.

Then the river took a sharp turn to the left, and as we rounded the corner we found ourselves faced with a long straight stretch before the river again turned to the right. We gazed down the valley for the Chandra Lake, which was to be our camping site for the night ; but we could see no hint of it and could only surmise that it lay round the next corner. The corner itself was a sufficient distance away, and we were all already weary with our exertions. A short halt was made for rest and food, and while I munched *chapattis* and bully beef the porters refreshed them-

selves with *satu*. This is a form of flour made from unripe barley grain and parched upon a flat stone laid over the fireplace. It is carried uncooked and is kneaded as required with cold water in the little cup that each Lahula carries, making a sustaining and tasty enough meal for a hungry man. As we ate, Moti Ram's eyes, of course, were roaming the hill-sides far and near, and he soon asked for my glasses. I had the greatest difficulty in picking up the ibex that he reported, but at last saw it, a solitary female moving over a snow-field on the slopes beyond the Chandra. She was apparently quite alone. Early that morning the porters had found the remains of an ibex in some snow, and they had feasted on the unsavoury morsel, with unsatisfactory results, as I found out when my medicines were in request.

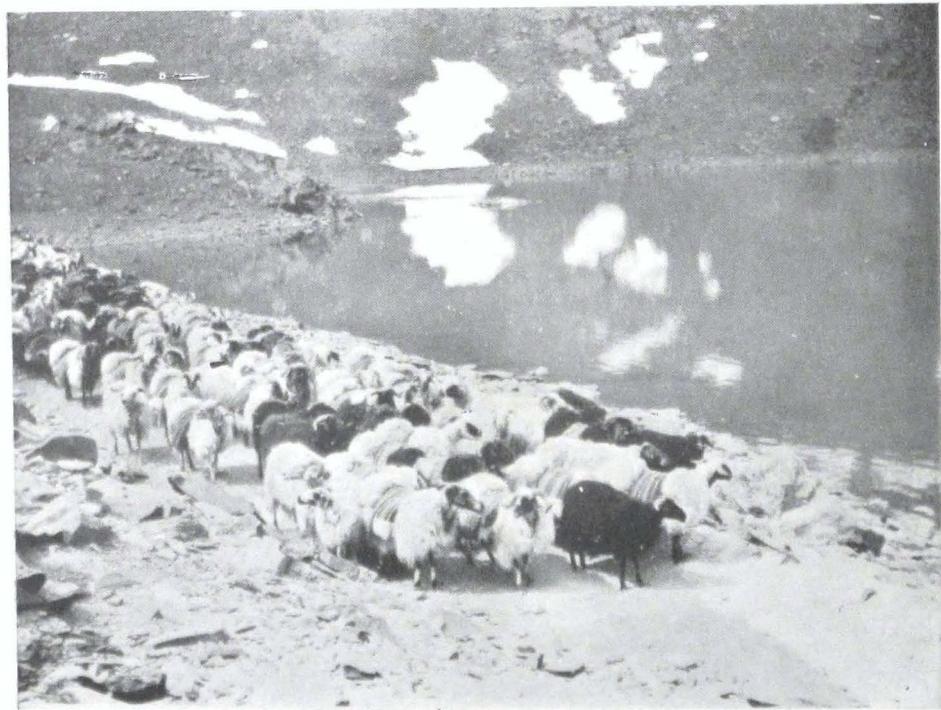
After this halt the journey seemed interminable. What, as we had rounded the corner, had appeared a fairly straightforward valley, proved on closer acquaintance to be intersected by numerous small side streams, none of great volume, but each flowing through a steep and narrow gorge cut by its progress over the high land between the river and the mountain slopes. Winding up and down the sides of these gorges and the loose shale that lined them, and threading our way amongst the boulders that strewed the ground everywhere, we grew more and more weary ; and yet we could see no hint of the Chandra Lake, which we assumed must be in the valley. Below us, clear to view in its deep-cut course, flowed the Chandra, a maze of channels amongst the beds of shingle, but nowhere was there any backwater or depression that might hold the lake.

At length we reached the second corner in the valley and halted for a rest. By this time I had long outstripped the baggage coolies, and neither the Thakur nor our orderlies knew the route, which we were afraid of losing. For here the valley was partly

blocked by a miniature range of hills and much broken ground about their base. As we looked down the course of the Chandra the great Kunzum range lay on our left hand ; to the right, across the river, lay a nameless series of peaks and glaciers, all part of the central core of Lahul. About the bend of the river the miniature range which I have mentioned stretched as a sort of buttress along the base of the Kunzum range, lying parallel with its axis between it and the river.

And then the unexpected happened ; two men emerged from a gully of the miniature range, the last sight to be expected in these wild and desolate mountains. We watched impatiently as they gradually moved up the valley towards us, now disappearing in some fold of the ground, now climbing some steep slope. At last they reached us, and proved to be two Gaddis belonging to the party we had seen at Dogpo Yogma. Each man carried his slender store of necessaries in a blanket slung on his back, and they were glad to learn that they were catching up their fellows. For us, too, there was good news in the encounter, for they told us that the Chandra Lake was close at hand, hidden between the miniature range and the foot of the Kunzum.

We parted from the Gaddis with mutual wishes for good luck, and were not long in reaching the little plain that held the lake. Would that I were master of words to describe the beauty of the scene that spread before our eyes. It was helped by contrast. For many weary miles we had marched through a stony waste of mountains, broken only by the monotony of the snow. Here in the hollow of the mountains the lake lay serene and smiling in the sunlight, an unruffled stretch of deep cerulean blue. Round the edge was a border of deep green, which at the near end melted gradually into a small verdant flower-spangled plain. The water extended for



(Upper) THE CHANDRA LAKE, 14,000 FEET

(Lower) TIBETAN SHEEP CARRYING SALT OVER THE  
BARALACHA PASS, 16,000 FEET



nearly a mile, but its width was less than half that distance, and its outline was broken by the curves of the slopes into which it nestled. On the right the lake was bounded by the gentle rounded contours of the little buttress range, but on the left a succession of stony slopes, here and there covered with a giant rubble of boulders, led up to the steep sides of the Kunzum range and its snows, glittering above the deep blue water. It was an impressive scene, and the silent motionless magnificence of it was heightened by the murmur and the sparkle of little sun-born streams of water running from the snows into the lake.

One of my reasons for travelling by this route was the expectation that the Chandra Lake might be one of the outlying breeding-stations of the lesser sand-plover (*Charadrius mongolus atrifrons*), which was known to breed in Tibet, but of which no authentic eggs existed in any collection. So my delight may be imagined as on walking towards the lake I disturbed from the marsh at the near end one of these lovely little plovers in full breeding dress. From its excitement and behaviour there was no doubt that the bird was on the breeding-ground, and with a little watching I had found two parties of the downy young within half-an-hour of our arrival at the lake. There were several pairs of the birds about, and I therefore arranged to halt the next day at the lake in order to secure the coveted novelty of the eggs.

I was out betimes next morning and carefully examined the whole circumference of the lake. There was a colony of marmots living in a patch of ground strewn with huge boulders on the Kunzum bank. A few snowcock could be heard calling on the stony hill-sides, and some of the coolies who went out to search for the dwarf scrubby bushes that grew here and there, and might serve as fuel, brought in three newly hatched chicks of this huge game bird.

Otherwise, with the exception of the plover, we saw only horned larks, Hodgson's yellow-headed wagtail and the robin accentor in the neighbourhood of the lake.

The morning passed without the eggs of the plover being discovered, so in the afternoon I turned out every member of the camp who had no definite work to search all the stony ground which the plover were frequenting. By evening two clutches of three eggs apiece had been discovered and the unknown eggs were unknown no more. They were incubated, but with careful work I was able to clean all six eggs; and one of the clutches now rests at South Kensington in the national collection.

Next morning we resumed our march early, as we had the crossing of the Morang Pass into Spiti before us; and as we left we saw a Brahminy duck arrive from the direction of the river and settle on the lake. Its mate was doubtless sitting on a nest somewhere on the hills, for this fine bird, so well known to sportsmen in India, breeds in cliffs at these great elevations in the Inner Himalayas.

There are two main passes on the Kunzum range into Spiti, both nearly 15,000 feet in elevation and both close together: one, the Morang Pass, is used by travellers approaching from the Baralacha, the other, known as the Kunzum, carries the ordinary route from Kulu to Spiti. On this occasion we crossed the Morang and entered Spiti, returning later over the Kunzum. For convenience, I will treat of Spiti separately, and will now proceed to describe the rest of our journey down the Upper Chandra Valley.

Arriving over the Kunzum, caravans usually halt at a spot known as Karcha, where tents are pitched on a stretch of sandy ground near a side tributary of the Chandra. This is to allow the tributary to be crossed very early in the morning, before the sun has had time to melt the snows above and swell the

stream. On this occasion we were anxious to press on to a spot farther along the valley where better grazing was to be had for the large number of yaks that we had taken from Spiti to carry our baggage, and for the Spiti ponies that had been bought by several members of the camp. We accordingly forded the stream—a business attended with some excitement and difficulty, as, although the stream was not more than waist-high, the current was very swift.

That night lingers in my memory as one of the most unpleasant that I have known. We were now in the portion of the valley that is known as the Shigri, which we may translate the Valley of the Glaciers. Andrew Wilson, who travelled this road in 1873, has thus described the Shigri : “ Looking down the valley, immense glaciers were seen flowing down the clefts, in the high mural precipices on both sides of the Chandra, and extending from the great beds of snow above, down to, and even into, the river. This was the Abode of Snow, and no mistake ; for nothing else but snow, glaciers and rocks were to be seen, and the great ice-serpents crept over into this dread valley as if they were living monsters.”

We were encamped on a patch of level ground, found with difficulty near the river, for the valley here grows narrower, and the icy waters of the Chandra and the cold blasts of wind roared and whistled past the tents all night. Glaciers filled the valleys all around, and in the morning we found that the sun could not penetrate into this deep and narrow gorge till long after sunrise. It was therefore with extreme reluctance and grumbling that we exchanged our beds for the outer world and breakfasted in the open while the tents were struck and packed. An unpleasant night was followed by a more unpleasant uprising, and it was a chilled and depressed camp that started on the march to cross the dreaded Shigri glacier.

Shigri is applied *par excellence* to one particular glacier that emerges from the mountains on the left bank of the Chandra. It is said to be several miles long, and the snout reaches right down to the river, lying athwart the customary road from Kulu to Spiti. Estimates differ as to the breadth of the glacier where it is crossed, as owing to its movement and roughness no two caravans cross it in exactly the same way, but it is not less than a mile wide. In 1836 this glacier burst its bounds and dammed the Chandra, causing the formation of a large lake, which finally broke loose and carried devastation down the valley. The story runs that the people of Spiti posted guards in the Kunzum Pass to watch whether the water would rise high enough to flow across it into Spiti.

We were not long in reaching the glacier. At this particular spot it differs greatly from the magnificent banks of snow-crowned ice which we had been seeing throughout our marches in Lahul, for the surface of the ice is hidden with an incredible debris of huge rocks and stones, splinters of rock and blackish soil, all wet and slippery, as the rays of the sun moisten the deep black gleaming ice that is revealed at the slightest scrape. The crossing is no light matter : men on foot have to wind their way amongst the huge boulders that litter the glacier, avoiding crevasses and climbing steep slopes, and no beast of burden other than a yak could carry a load across. The yaks were magnificent ; grunting and snorting they moved along at their customary pace, their short and sturdy legs caring naught for boulder and bank, which their terrific strength allowed them to climb over. The Spiti ponies, although bearing only their saddles, were in much greater straits, and in places each pony had to be helped, pushed and pulled by four men. Yet the ponies of Spiti are renowned throughout the hills for their sure-footed endurance of the roughest ground. Here they

seemed to realise the presence of the unknown, and to lose their nerve.

In due course the last man and the last yak were off the glacier, but the road continued to be very difficult and hard to recognise amongst the boulders until we came to another small glacier, known as the Chota Shigri. This is a comparatively small glacier, and it does not reach down to the bed of the river ; but it is most steep and slippery and difficult to cross, being at this point more purely composed of ice than was the main Shigri. It could not, however, be avoided, as the alternative was the more dangerous passage of the swift torrent which emerges from under the glacier and pours down into the Chandra.

The journey down the Chandra for the rest of the stage to Fitti Runi and thence on to Chatru calls for little comment. It was monotonous rather than difficult, an endless threading of narrow paths amongst the cliffs and boulder-strewn ravines, now climbing up the hill-side, now winding down towards the river. Here we were free of the snow, though it of course still crowned the mountains all above us, and we began to meet the flocks of sheep which the Gaddis were marching up the valley to take advantage of the Alpine pastures as they cleared of snow and broke into the luxuriance of their brief summer.

One pleasant incident is connected with the march. We had halted in a level stream bed to eat our scanty lunch opposite to a particularly weird peak, and after the meal one of my companions sauntered up and put a small object into my hand. It was a little wooden figure of a lama, carved with excellent taste and skill and richly gilt. I admired it and handed it back with a few words of appreciation, only to be told that it was meant for me to keep. I accepted it most gratefully, and on inquiring about its origin was told that it was the gift of one of the Spiti lombardars, who had carried it as a talisman. And thus the little figure

remains with me, enshrining all my memories of the Valley of Glaciers.

From Chatru, instead of continuing down the Chandra Valley to Koksar, we moved up the magnificent side valley that leads to the great Humpta Pass, which on this occasion proved very difficult to cross. The usual road was rendered impassable by a huge drift of frozen snow, and we had instead to move up the valley until we were directly below the summit of the Pass and then climb almost perpendicularly up the last thousand feet. The actual summit was very rough and crowded with boulders, and it took some time to get the yaks across, as this route is more suitable for the coolies that are usually employed.

As we crossed the watershed we were once again within the territories of the monsoon, and the long descent from the Pass through beds of shingle and shale and drifts of frozen snow was wreathed in great banks of cloud and ever-drifting mist that robed the steep mountain slopes in mystery ; the curtains of mist and drizzle would drift apart, revealing rugged cliff and tortuous corrie, closing again before we had gazed our fill, and setting the stage for some fresh half-seen panorama. The chill and mournful atmosphere forbade us to linger and risk the ever-looming rain, and we hurried down the great Humpta nullah with what speed we might. The descent was fairly steep, and soon we were down to the level of the first stunted birch-trees. Then came the birch woods, welcome in their soft greenery after the desolate wastes we were leaving ; birch gave place to pine and fir and chestnut, and the stunted Alpine plants were replaced by the rich luxuriance of a Himalayan valley in the monsoon. Lahul and Spiti were but a memory, and we were back in Kulu and the haunts of men.

We camped that night at Jhikka, the name given to a rich glade by the Humpta river. Behind us rose

great cliffs wreathed in silver fir and spruce, and standing in a base of woods that reached down to our tents. Across the river we gazed at an amphitheatre of pasture and forest, very pleasing to the eye. This Humpta nullah is noted ground for the shikari. Ibex are found on its highlands, red bear and black bear are found in the forests, and at its beginning, towards Juggutsukh, is a series of vast precipices which are renowned for thar and musk-deer.

On account of these precipices it is necessary to cross the road at Jhikka and travel down on the other side of the Humpta river. There is no bridge, and we had the utmost difficulty in getting the baggage across. The yaks were made to swim the torrent. We drove them into the water and they battled across with much exertion, owing to the roughness and force of the water. But all the loads had to be carried by hand across a rough bridge, which we constructed from small fir trunks with the aid of all the coolies. In the process one of the Spiti lombardars had his hand badly crushed; but although we offered to have the injury properly treated at the Kulu hospital, he preferred to trust his own rough remedies and travel back to his beloved mountains. And so we parted from the men of Spiti.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GAME BIRDS OF LAHUL AND SPITI

COMPARED with the profusion of game birds in the Himalayas and the plains of India, the poverty of Lahul and Spiti in this respect is very marked. There are scarcely more than a dozen species of bird which fall under this category, and of these the majority are so scarce that the sportsman can only expect to meet them by accident.

The snowcock and the chukor, however, are found in sufficient numbers to provide good sport, and these two species may be included amongst the finest game birds of the Indian Empire. Yet it is doubtful whether they ever provide shooting for British sportsmen in these provinces.

The killing of snowcock and chukor is forbidden under the rules of the Forest Act until after 15th September, and even did no such rule exist, the coveys would hardly be ready before that date. This renders small-game shooting in Spiti impossible, except for anyone prepared to winter in the country, while as regards Lahul, the sportsman who stayed up long enough to enjoy the chukor and snowcock would risk detention of his baggage, if not of himself, by the closing of the passes with snow. In neither country do the passes open again before the end of the season.

It may be that a few odd birds are killed for the pot by men who have gone up into the mountains in pursuit of burhel or ibex, and who rightly hold that the difficulties of the kitchen in their distant shooting grounds justify a slight infraction of the game laws.

A certain number of birds are shot by the Lahulas, but guns are scarce in the country and the toll taken in this way is probably negligible. They, however, destroy great quantities of nests, as every egg found is taken for eating unless obviously hard set. When fresh, chukors' eggs are very good eating, and they are easily found by the people ; hence the unsophisticated traveller who does not appreciate the scarcity of fowls in Lahul and applies to the contractors for eggs for the kitchen almost invariably finds himself supplied with chukors' eggs.

Many chicks are caught by the Lahulas in the hopes of rearing them as cage birds, but the majority of these are never reared. The Tibetan inhabitants of Spiti appear to destroy neither birds, eggs nor chicks, and in this respect at least follow the dictates of their religion.

The Himalayan snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*) is found throughout Lahul and Spiti at altitudes over 12,000 feet in summer, descending in winter to lower levels, and even migrating in all probability to the ranges of Kulu. It may be considered as a giant form of partridge, and its shape and bearing emphasise the relationship. The plumage is largely ash-grey in colour with much minute stippling, with broad chestnut streaks on the wings and sides, and a large white patch amongst the primaries ; the lower parts are whitish, with a necklace of chestnut on the throat and a broad blackish band across the breast. Cocks weigh up to  $7\frac{1}{4}$  lb. The hen merely differs in her smaller size, the weight being about 5 lb., and in the absence of spurs.

Snowcock are typically birds of the more barren Alpine pastures, where stony slopes, covered with short coarse grass, separate the barren sides of the gorges, with their slides of shale and boulder, from the more stable cliffs and rocky ledges that hold the snow-clad peaks. Here they feed, cropping the short

grass, walking slowly with deliberate gait along the steep incline, or resting in the sun upon some vantage-point. They are very wary, and do not easily allow a close approach unless the intruder comes from below, when they march slowly up the hill-side, jerking their tails up towards the back and exhibiting the white under-coverts, in the fashion of a moor-hen. It is a grand sight to see a covey of these giant partridges walking away from one without haste and without apparent anxiety, turning as they go to look down at the cause of alarm. They are loath to take to wing, but once they do the flight is strong and rapid, and they launch straight out into the air, flying right across the valley on to a distant spur, or sweeping round the contours of the hills. I have seen a covey fly from a hill-side so straight into mid-air that they cannot have been less than 3000 feet above the ground, and looked like sparrows in the void. As they fly the valley resounds with their alarm whistle, "Quick quick, quick quick"—a sound that no sportsman searching for ibex or burhel cares to provoke. In flight the white wing patch is very distinctive.

When danger threatens they often climb on to the top of some mighty boulder and there may be seen silhouetted against the sky. They roost in similar situations, or on the ledges of precipitous ground. In one shooting camp I found that a covey came to roost at night on the ledges of a rock the size of a house, which stuck out from the hill-side far above my camp. I tried for them one evening as darkness fell, but all that I could see was a momentary glimpse of a head against the sky-line on the rock.

Owing to his size and wariness the snowcock is usually shot with a small rifle, but I found that they could often be killed with a shot-gun, provided one was careful to approach them from below. They allowed one generally to come within eighty yards or so in the open as they slowly walked uphill, and they

were not particularly suspicious of my disappearance from sight. Then if the contours were steep, or large rocks afforded cover, it was possible to run in close enough to shoot, as the birds rose at one's sudden re-appearance near them. But a snowcock is a tough bird, and the charge that brings him down must be lodged in the right spot. A little divergence and the bird carries on, to die hundreds of feet below, an unexpected meal for fox or eagle. On one occasion I knocked a snowcock over so that he fell on the snow just below the crest of a ridge. I went to the spot and found the bird lying there on the very point of death. He was lying at the top of a slope of frozen snow which covered the steep side of the valley for a thousand feet. Caution was necessary, so I decided not to touch the bird until its life was gone, for fear that the feel of my hand would cause one last frantic struggle. The end came—a matter of seconds—and with the passing of the last breath there was one convulsive kick. The heavy body started down the frozen slope, gathering momentum as it went, and I saw it no more.

My largest bag of snowcock in a single day has been four birds picked up, and, curiously enough, that was obtained on the first occasion that I ever met with the species ; this was not in Lahul, but on the Duala Dhar range, above Dharmasala. The day started with a climb round the bare shoulder of a spur, where I came upon a covey of five snowcock walking up the steep side of a hummock, jerking their tails and very erect in attitude. I crouched motionless until they disappeared over the top of the hummock and then ran to cut them off, with such success that I came on them well in shot in a little nullah behind the hummock. They rose at once and flew down the nullah in front of me, affording an easy shot ; but my run had winded me, and though one bird dropped to the shot, somersaulting down the hill till it lodged in some

boulders, the second bird was not killed clean and went away hard hit out of sight.

For a long time I could find no more coveys and was growing apprehensive as to my chances of further sport when three snowcock unexpectedly rose from the side of a ridge above me and flew whistling across the valley on to another spur. A fourth bird then caught my eye standing on a rock above, and hoping that he belonged to a fresh covey I essayed a stalk. The ground was very difficult, frozen snow accentuating the steepness of the slope, and this hindered my progress, with the result that eventually the bird saw me and flew across the valley to join the others. To pursue them entailed a steep detour into a nullah and a still steeper climb up the far side ; the descent was very difficult on the frozen slopes and necessitated the hacking out of steps for my feet with the butt of my 20-bore. However, in due course, I reached the bottom and crossed the drifts of snow that lined the valley bed.

The stalk that followed was a severe test of wind and limb. I had to climb the reverse side of the spur, on which the birds had settled, and this was an almost perpendicular face, cut out by the action of a torrent. By the time I had reached the top the birds had moved from the spot where they had been marked down, but the slushy ground, thawing in the sun, revealed their footprints, and the lie of the spur made their path fairly obvious. Large boulders littered the slopes and afforded me cover. At last I discovered them in a small corrie by their agitated calling. What this was due to was unknown to me at the moment, but I was satisfied that they could not be aware of my presence. However something was wrong, and they were ready to fly at any moment, so I hastily crawled to the edge of the corrie and peered over a rock. With pounding breath I raised my gun. There were seven or eight snowcock

bunched together within easy range, their heads up like a flock of geese, whistling in alarm. I took two heads in line with my choke barrel and dropped a third bird as the covey launched themselves into mid-air. One bird lay dead behind a stone, another was slipping and sliding down a stretch of frozen snow, and the third stood dazed, likely to be a runner as soon as it had collected its wits. My orderly leapt down the hill in pursuit of the rolling bird, and as he did so he yelled and pointed. But I paid no heed, slipping in fresh cartridges in order to give the runner its quietus. As I did so there was a rushing, tearing sound in the sky and a golden eagle came down with a terrific stoop at the body of the snowcock which the orderly was pursuing. A hasty snapshot taught the robber to respect my game, and the three snowcock were at last duly retrieved. Then the orderly had time to tell me why he had shouted and pointed, and the reason explained the agitation of the covey ; for a leopard had been stalking them on the farther side to myself. It recalled a similar occasion when an old hill fox and I similarly in competition had stalked a covey of chukor, to our mutual surprise and undoing.

The snowcock breeds from May to July, laying its eggs in a scrape under a rock. The eggs are olive or brownish stone colour, spotted with darker brown. They are usually four or five in number, and measure about 65 mm. by 45 mm. The usual name for this bird in the Kulu subdivision and Kangra is Golind or Gleund ; the name, Ram chukar, usually quoted for this species, appears to belong more correctly to the snow partridge.

The smaller Tibetan snowcock (*Tetraogallus tibetanus*) is said to occur within our area, but there is no very satisfactory information on the point. Snowcock are a little coarse for the table and sometimes are unpleasantly strong in taste, but on the whole they may

be considered good eating. The eggs are considered a special delicacy by the Lahulas.

The chukor (*Alectoris græca chukar*) is very common in Lahul throughout the Chandra and Bhaga valleys up to an altitude of 13,000 or 14,000 feet, from about Koksar to Darcha. It appears to be very scarce in Spiti, and about the Baralacha, Upper Chandra Valley and the Lingti Plain it does not occur, there being therefore a substantial gap between the distribution of this form and the larger paler *A. g. pallidescens*, the chukor of Ladakh. The chukor of Lahul is very similar to the red-legged partridge introduced into England, and chiefly differs from it in lacking the fringe of black spots outside the necklace band. Chukor weigh from a pound to a pound and a half.

The chukor is more abundant in Lahul than in any locality with which I am acquainted, and there can be no doubt that excellent shooting might be obtained there in autumn. During the summer it is a familiar sight on every march to see and hear the cocks calling from some vantage-point, usually a large stone, on the hill-side, with complete disdain for the travellers who pass along the road. While so engaged they are negligent of an approach, and I plead guilty to having sniped with a .22 bullet an occasional bird for the pot. As the crops grow the chukor are less in evidence until the chicks hatch out, and then the young broods are frequently seen with their parents. The young very quickly learn to scatter and hide amongst the stones and to fly down the hill-side, and though one may often come round a corner on to a brood of a dozen chicks, it is a matter of difficulty to catch a single one of the tiny things.

The chukor of Lahul are in great repute as fighting birds, yet it is curious that they seldom seem to be kept in cages by the Lahulas; but in Kulu caged

chukor are a common object of the bazaar, one being in the possession of every second household.

The eggs closely resemble those of the red-legged partridge, and the usual number laid in Kulu appears to be a dozen. The nests are scrapes under stones and amongst bushes, and they are readily found by the Lahulas, who habitually search for and eat the eggs. At Gondla I discovered a nest with twelve eggs, which was situated in the crown of a pollard willow by the roadside, some ten feet from the ground. The old bird sitting on the nest caught my eye as I passed along the road. The eggs may be found from the middle of May until well into July.

I was never successful in shooting a specimen of the snow partridge (*Lerwa lerwa*) in Lahul, and apparently they are very rare both there and in Spiti. The snow partridge is closely related to the ptarmigan of Europe, but is rather different in coloration. The upper surface is completely barred and pencilled in shades of black and grey and brown to resemble the granite rocks amongst which the species lives; the breast and central abdomen are of a deep chocolate-colour, and the flanks bear the conspicuous streakings so common in the partridge group. There is a whitish patch in the wings. The bill and legs are bright red. They weigh about a pound up to a pound and a half. This bird occupies the edge of the snow-line, however high and barren it may be, and seldom comes down even as low as 10,000 feet. It is found in coveys which have a reputation for foolishness, and when disturbed are very noisy, uttering a loud whistle.

The Tibetan sand-grouse (*Syrrhaptes tibetanus*) belongs to the group with legs and toes closely feathered to the claws, to which belongs Pallas' sand-grouse, celebrated for its occasional incursions into Great Britain. This fine bird, which breeds commonly in Ladakh and other portions of Central Asia, is found in small numbers on the Lingti Plain, but it

does not venture into Spiti or the other portions of Lahul.

*Faut de mieux* the pigeons must be included amongst the game birds of Lahul, and they certainly afford a welcome addition to the larder. There are three members of the genus *Columba*—namely, the Blue Rock pigeon (*C. livia neglecta*), the Snow pigeon (*C. leuconota leuconota*), and the Hill Rock pigeon (*C. rufescens*). There is no need to describe the Blue Rock pigeon, which belongs to a type familiar to sportsmen; the Hill Rock pigeon is a somewhat similar bird, but may easily be distinguished by the whitish under-parts and the broad white bar in the tail. The Snow pigeon is, however, a distinctly different bird, largely brown and white, with a sharply defined dark sooty head, which at once identifies it.

The Blue Rock and the Snow pigeon are found more or less throughout Spiti and Lahul, but are most numerous in the cultivated tracts of the Chandra Valley, where they feed in the cultivation and appear to do a good deal of damage to the seed barley. Both birds may be found together, and out of the nesting season might provide good shooting, as, when once disturbed, they become very wary and fly well.

The Hill Rock pigeon I have met only in the higher tracts, from 12,500 feet upwards, about the Baralacha and the Lingti Plain and Spiti. It is the common pigeon of the latter province, and is there absurdly tame, feeding about the houses and fields, allowing the closest approach. The Tibetans do not molest it in any way, and dislike any interference with it; so this species should not be killed unless really needed for food.

In these tracts the three species of pigeon appear to breed solely in cliffs and never in buildings.

I saw no species of dove in Spiti, but a form of the turtle dove (*Streptopelia orientalis meena*) is common in Lahul wherever there are willows or junipers to

afford it a nesting site. A few ring doves (*S. decaocto*) are found in similar situations.

The Himalayan solitary snipe (*Capella solitaria*) is a rare bird in Lahul, but it may occasionally be met with.

A few forms of duck occur in that country, but the swift streams and rivers are ill adapted to their needs. Small tanks at Gimur and Sissoo are the most likely localities in which to look for them. The Brahminy duck or ruddy sheldrake (*Casarca ferruginea*) and the goosander (*Merganser merganser orientalis*) breed in small numbers in the highest zone, over 14,000 feet, and of these the former is the only species of duck that I have observed in Spiti.

The mallard (*Anas p. platyrhyncha*), the teal (*Nettion c. crecca*), the pintail (*Dafila acuta*) and the white-eyed pochard (*Nyroca r. rufa*) all occur within my knowledge in Lahul, and this list might probably be extended. It is remarkable, however, that the multitudes of geese that breed in the lakes of Ladakh and Western Tibet appear to pass over the country in their migrations to and from the plains of India and never to visit Lahul itself.

## CHAPTER XI

### IN THE SPITI VALLEY

PROVIDED they are free of snow, the Morang and Kunzum passes into Spiti are very easy to cross, as the grassy slopes are free of rocks and boulders, and the levels are not severe. The Morang is the more difficult, as it entails the passage of the Lichu river, which rises on the Kunzum and flows down across the bottom of the Morang slope.

It did not take us long to move down from the summit of the Morang into the valley, and we found ourselves on the bank of the Lichu, which already, but two or three miles from its source, had become a raging mountain torrent. It was not deep, for we were able to pick a ford where the water did not rise much above our knees, but the breadth was considerable, and the rush of the water over the stony bottom was so strong that it was difficult for a man to wade alone, and we crossed in twos and threes, holding hands. These torrents have without exception to be forded, as bridges are unknown in Upper Spiti, and except on a cold dull day it is necessary to pass them early in the morning, before the snow-water melted by the fierce sun on the heights above arrives to make their passage dangerous, if not impossible. It is astonishing with what fierce speed the water rushes, as the drop down the hill-sides is exceedingly steep. Men on foot have to link arms and wade diagonally across the stream, which soon rises waist-high, and as the day advances only the strength of a yak can face the raging stream. Apart from the actual force of the water, its rapidity has the effect of making giddy



(Upper) LOADING UP THE YAKS IN SPITI AT 13,000 FEET

(Lower) BAGGAGE COOLIES FORDING THE LICHU RIVER,  
SPITI, AT 13,500 FEET



men both on foot and on horseback ; and I have seen a man so affected by this factor that he could not continue the passage without assistance : alone he would infallibly have been drowned.

This side valley of the Lichu is surprisingly verdant, and we moved down the rough track over grassy stretches bright with flowers, and past beds of dwarf willow and a tamarisk-like shrub that thickly clothes much of the bed of the valley.

A few miles of the Lichu and we had reached its junction with the Spiti river and the camping-ground of Tharcha, which lies within the fork. Here we found a small party of Tibetan nomads, who were grazing their ponies on the rich pastures by the river. Close to the camping-ground we were met by the lombardar of Losar, who had been summoned by advance messenger sent from the Chandra Lake to bid him prepare for our arrival. He was a picturesque figure and typical of the men of Spiti. A long loose robe of thick woollen cloth of a reddish colour was girt in at the waist with a broad sash ; the length of this gown distinguishes the Spiti men from the Ladakhis, who wear their gown much higher, hitched well up about the waist. The long cloth boots were soled with untanned leather, after the moccasin fashion, and were tied round the leg below the knee. A red shawl or plaid, edged with a bright Bashiri pattern, was thrown over one shoulder. Under the long gown no other clothes were worn—as we had ample opportunity of observing during the fording of the rivers. On his head was a close sheepskin cap, the wool innermost, prolonged into two side peaks, somewhat after the fashion of an admiral's cocked hat. A rough lump of turquoise hung from each ear, and with the short greasy pigtail enhanced the curiously feminine look of the almost moustacheless Tibetan face. He knew no language save the Bhotia or Tibetan dialect, which is the mother tongue of

Spiti, and indeed during my whole visit to Spiti I met only one or two men who understood a little of the ordinary Hindustani, which is the medium of intercourse throughout India.

We camped at Tharcha, and I had leisure to view the wonderful panorama of the head of the Spiti Valley. Before us was the commencement of the Spiti river, which is formed amidst a wide expanse of sand and stone by the junction of the Lichu and another stream, the Pitú, which rises on the 20,000-feet snowy peak, Kiii. The valley of the Spiti is wide and open, with a gentle slope, and comprises the remains of a plain a mile or two wide. The central portion of this plain has been cut away by the passage of the river, which meanders in various channels through a network of shingle beds, here and there dotted with the dwarf willow and the tamarisk. On both sides of the river the remains of the plain stand up as plateaux, which here and there hold the cultivation and the tiny hamlets that pass as villages in Spiti. Behind and above the plateaux rise the rocky cliffs and steep slopes of shale that form the foot of the mountains. The crossing of a single range had brought us into a new country. Gone were the magnificent peaks and glaciers of Lahul. Here we were back again in country resembling that of the Lingti Plain. Torn and twisted strata produced strange fantasies of shape and colour, the barrenness of stone had taken the place of the dead mystery of snow, and the hill-sides were more fantastic in their shapes, cut and wrought into the semblance of some vast Gothic nightmare.

Next morning we moved on to Losar, the first village of Spiti, which with its altitude of 13,000 feet must be one of the highest villages of the world. It may be described as a sample of all the Spiti villages that I saw, except that some are situated in more picturesque situations, on the edge of rocky ravines.

Losar consists of some twenty houses, set together in straggling order in the midst of a small patch of cultivation. The houses are mostly all of the same type. There is a small central court, surrounded on three sides by the buildings, which vary in height up to three stories, and on the fourth side by a high wall pierced with the entrance door. The walls are thick and rough, composed of stone and plaster, white-washed on both sides, while the roofs are flat and neatly topped with a coping of faggots, the dark colour of which stands out in striking contrast with the white walls. The roof is usually crowned with shreds of cloth and prayer-flags streaming in the wind from sticks and poles, and here and there black yaks' tails are stuck up to ward off evil spirits. Within the rooms are dark and dirty, and living-rooms, store-rooms and cattle-sheds are all grouped together in unpleasant proximity. The wooden tea-churn is a prominent article of household furniture. There are no beds, but several members of the family sleep along the floor in line, their heads supported by a low wooden rack, which serves as a pillow.

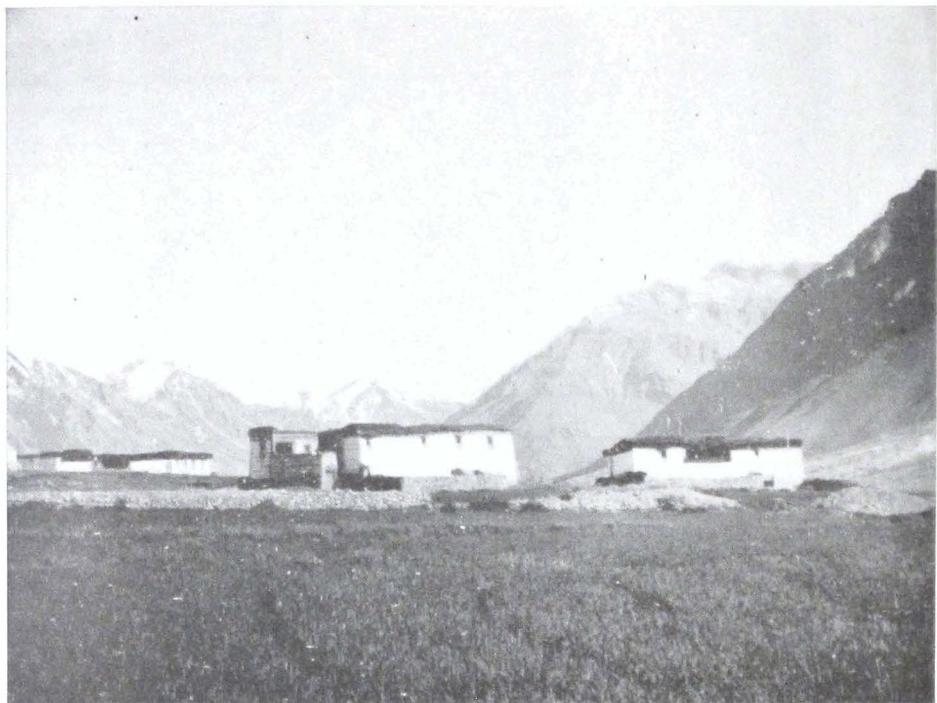
The fields round the village are small and are roughly irrigated by water brought in channels from the hill-sides. The staple crop is barley, though several fields are sown with green peas. Along the edges of the fields there is a border of grass which is bright with various flowers of familiar types—Canterbury bells, columbines, mallows, and the like.

The name Spiti, locally pronounced Piti, is said to mean the "middle province," and refers to the position of the country between Tibet, India and the old kingdoms of Kashmir. The country may be considered as even more mountainous and elevated than Lahul, the lowest part of the Spiti Valley lying at an elevation of 11,000 feet. The average elevation of the mountain ranges is over 18,000 feet, and the highest peak is over 23,000 feet in height. Enormous

mountain ranges fence in the whole country, crossed by various little-known passes which are seldom used, the main avenue of approach being from the junction of the Spiti river with the Sutlej, through the province of Bashehr. Indeed Spiti may be considered one of the least accessible portions of the Indian Empire. For administrative purposes it is linked with the subdivision of Kulu in the district of Kangra, but in actual fact there is very little direct contact between Spiti and the officials appointed to manage it, and authority is largely vested in an individual known as the Nono of Spiti, who occupies a position analogous to the Thakur of Lahul in his own country. That this should be so is inevitable when it is remembered that contact between Spiti and Kulu is only possible for a few months in summer, when the passes are free from snow, and then only by a route which entails at least five days' marching through uninhabited mountain valleys, where even firewood is not obtainable. The total population remains very stationary—about the number of three thousand souls—with the low average of three persons per house and family. This is due, not so much to the rigours and hardships of life on the roof of the world, as to the direct influence of the monastic system, which has been directed with complete success to the end that there should be no change and no progress in the country, as will be explained later on.

As in the case of Lahul, Spiti may be divided into two areas: the northern area is known as Tsarab and adjoins the Lingti Plain, draining with it into the Indus river; while the southern area, divided from Tsarab by the continuation of the great Baralacha range, comprises the watershed of the Spiti river, with its numerous tributaries draining into the Sutlej.

The Spiti Valley, with its channels and plateaux, has already been described; the tributary streams



(Upper) LOSAR, THE HIGHEST VILLAGE IN SPITI, 13,000 FEET

(Lower) TIBETANS OF SPITI DANCING A PRIMITIVE FOLK DANCE



flow through valleys of the same type, but most of them, before their junction with the Spiti river, are forced into narrow chasms in the rocky heights that surround the main valley. The depth of these chasms is enormous ; on the Shila river the walls of the gorge are estimated at not less than 2000 feet in height, while the Pin Gorge is several miles long, and there are other similar ones in the country.

At Losar we had to part with the Lahula porters who had come with us from Kyelang and Jispar, and who by the settlement terms could not be obliged to go farther than Losar. We accordingly paid them off and wished them good luck on their return journey to Lahul. A better and a more willing lot of men one could never wish to have, and we often sighed for their presence again after our experiences with the Spiti begaris.

The Kulu subdivision is one of the few parts of India where the system of "begar" is still in force, though it is now greatly modified and relaxed. There has been a great deal of misconception and distrust of the system, chiefly owing to the translation of the word "begar" by "forced labour." The origin of the practice is very ancient and is feudal in character, for it depends on the rights of the old hill rajas to demand personal service from all landholders ; these services varied on the occasions of war, marriage, travel and the like, but undoubtedly the most important of them came to be the supply of portage. With the coming of British rule and the uprooting of the rajas these feudal services were greatly cut down and practically confined to the supplying of portage to travellers on demand. Some such system was necessary in remote hill tracts where roads were poor and bad and other methods of transport unsatisfactory, and in compensation for it the people have been given considerable concessions in the matter of land revenue—a fact which is conveniently

forgotten by those whose profit it is to agitate against the system. All porters supplied under the system are paid according to rates laid down by Government, and the only hardship in the matter is that certain villages, owing to their geographical situation near frequented routes, have to supply porters more frequently than in the case of the more remote tracts, where it is doubtful whether the obligation to do "begar" falls more frequently than two or three times in a year on a man. For it must be remembered that there is no hardship in the actual carrying of a load some forty pounds, strange though it may seem to English ideas. From the earliest age the boys and girls of these hill regions are accustomed to carry loads on their shoulders, and all along the roads one meets men and women trudging along about their own business, bent beneath the weighty loads upon their backs—baskets of manure, great slabs of rock salt, bags of grain and the like.

The system of "begar" is of course liable to abuse, like any other system, and it is a constant anxiety to the British official to see that his Indian subordinates do not use it to oppress the people. In Kulu and Lahul there was no difficulty in obtaining porters, for the system had been brought to perfection in its working. The number of coolies required was ordered, and they duly arrived and carried their load a stage, and were paid for it, knowing that the duty fell on all in turn.

But we soon learnt that it was not to be such plain sailing in Spiti. Travellers are too few in number in that remote land for "begar" to have become a matter of routine. The headmen cannot say whose turn it is to render assistance, and the people are not capable of settling amicably who shall turn out and who shall stay at home. The result was that no notice was taken of our instructions as to the number of baggage coolies required, but each house in the area affected

sent a representative, either man or monk, strapping girl, or small boy with a baggage yak. On the morning of our departure from Losar we were awakened early by the babel that arose from this mixed contingent as it arrived at the camp, and from that moment till the taking up of the last package the process of striking camp and packing up was punctuated with a series of skirmishes between the servants and the begaris ; for it was the aim of the latter individually to seize a light and inadequate burden and hurry off with it to the next stage. They were a noisy, good-humoured crowd, and in their heart of hearts enjoyed the excitement of the unusual experience. Yet it was their mutual jealousy and inability to co-operate that brought double the number of porters required. However, it transpired in due course that these Spiti folk were not nearly as strong as the Lahulas nor able to carry their full loads, so the turning out of the people *en masse* had its compensations. It had a humorous side too, when on one march we found a man leading a yak with no heavier burden than a hurricane lantern !

The marches in Spiti were very wearisome. The roads were merely the roughest of rough paths, leading over interminable wastes of stones, or across steep slopes of shale, and there was no shade to protect us from the fierce rays of the sun and the glare from the stones and rocks. During the greater part of the day we suffered also from the strong Tibetan wind, which was tiring enough when we were marching against it, and which parched and cracked the lips so that talking and eating were a trial, and the use of a toothbrush a matter of severe discomfort.

Below Losar the first village of importance is Hansi, and here we were entertained by the people with one of their dances. It was a most primitive affair. Men and women formed up in a broad semi-circle, holding hands intercrossed, and marched

round and round, advancing and retiring in time to a rough chant which they themselves intoned. This caused a great deal of merriment and laughing, and the dancers at last left off very pleased with themselves and each other, and a little shy at having danced in front of strange officials.

The first stage below Losar is at a small village called Kioto, which is somewhat sheltered from the wind by a series of humps and hillocks, and a great precipice that overhangs the spot.

The commencement of the march down the valley next day was remarkable for the fantastic shapes into which the edges of the plateaux on both sides of the river have been cut. These are apparently due to the action of the wind and the almost complete absence of rain, for the simplest form consists of a pointed pinnacle surmounted by the large stone which has protected the ground beneath it from being cut away. They are elaborated into the most complicated series of carvings, which in the distance acquire the semblance of palaces and castles, and lend the charm of imagination to views that otherwise are bare and harsh.

We were riding up one of the shale slopes in this portion of the valley when we met a Tibetan, who informed us in the most matter-of-fact tone that a girl, one of our begaris, had been drowned. I was naturally very shocked by the news and asked for further details, to be told that she had been washed away while wading one of the torrents with a basket of utensils on her back. The most circumstantial details of the tragedy were given, and I was turning over in my mind the best course to pursue when the Thakur told me that in his opinion the man was lying. An animated conversation then ensued in Tibetan, and finally the man was told to come along to the camp and stay there until the young lady returned to life. It then transpired that the full extent

of the tragedy was the loss of some cooking pots and a couple of iron traps. The girl had lost her footing momentarily in the rough water and stumbled, upsetting her basket-load into the water. It was not known how I would greet the news of the loss of my property, so wisdom decreed that it would be more convenient to hide the rest of the contents of the basket and inform me that the begari was drowned. This plan held the further advantage that the other articles would be available for distribution amongst the girl and her relatives, but my inconvenient curiosity and concern spoiled the whole plan.

A few miles below Kioto the road leaves the river and climbs on to a range of hills, where there is a level plain covered with grass and a rough Tibetan furze. During the summer months this plain is a rendezvous for merchants, who bring sheep, corn, wool and salt for barter and sale. Their tiny camps are pitched on the plain, with the merchandise stacked round the tents, while their ponies and sheep graze loose about the hill-sides. We spent an interesting hour here going round the tents and chatting to their owners, but my hope and search for nice saddle cloths and carpets proved fruitless.

From here the character of the road changed ; the dull red and purple cliffs, stony plains and drifts of shale through which we had travelled from Losar gave place to rolling downs, intersected by steep, narrow gorges. There was abundance of rich pasture, cut up by small rills and patches of bog. Here there was no tree-growth at all ; even the scattered birch-trees and willows of Losar had gone, but in the more sheltered gorges a few dwarf willow shrubs lined the water streams, and brier bushes with pretty pink roses grew here and there on their stony sides.

The village of Kibar is quite imposing for Spiti, and this is due to the fact that it is built partly on the edge of a deep rocky ravine, the steep sides and

sharp-cut strata of which give quite an air of distinction to the site. At Kibar we saw the first of the temples of Spiti ; one was little more than a single room, the other was a more imposing edifice, with the courtyard built up on a high embankment. It was in charge of an aged red lama of benign aspect, who was pleased to show us round and expatiate on the treasures that adorned his charge. Of these the most interesting to me were a couple of the small memorials made from the ashes of a cremated lama, mixed with clay and stamped with the image of the Buddha. Another thing that caught my notice was an extremely fine pair of horns of the burhel, which with others had been stuck up in the temple. In Lahul we had grown accustomed to the sight of ibex horns stacked on the roofs of houses or placed on some way-side shrine. Here in Spiti numbers of burhel horns took their place, piled round cairns in the fields and placed in the temples.

The temple room itself was much after the Lahul type, but smaller, darker and dirtier, and of only one story, and it entirely lacked the Hindu influences that are such a feature of the Buddhism of Lahul. In the open courtyard a small Union Jack was flying (upside down) amongst the tattered prayer-flags. In response to my somewhat surprised question the old lama said that it had been a present to him from the last Englishman that had passed that way.

We pitched our tents at Kibar, and here I had to make up my mind how to use the short time that remained to me. There were two alternatives : either to move up out of the valley on to the highlands in pursuit of burhel, or to march farther down the valley to see Drankhar, which is remarkable for a bridge and for the remains of an old fort which is now the property of Government. This fort gives its name to the place—Drankhar, the “cold fort.” The town is perched about 1000 feet above the Spiti

river, on the ledges and towers of an immense ridge of soft strata, which is suddenly broken off above the river, the whole situation and appearance of the place being very remarkable. In 1849, soon after Spiti fell into British possession, Major Hay, Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, spent most of the winter in this fort, preparing a report on Spiti for Government.

This notable spot is well worth a visit, but the claims of sport proved too great to be disregarded, and I gave up the time to the pursuit of burlel, after a visit to the famous monastery of Kyi.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE RELIGION OF SPITI

THE religion of Spiti is the Buddhism which is found generally throughout Tibet, without any of the admixtures of Hinduism which we found so prevalent in Lahul; it, however, shares with Lahul a contamination from the indigenous prehistoric demonology of the mountains.

The most prominent feature of the Buddhism of Tibet is the hierarchy which has been built up in the course of time, both for the control of the religion and for the exploitation of the people practising it and living under its sway. The original teaching of Buddha included an elaborate monastic system, without priests and without superior degrees, under which all men were equal. Until the beginning of the fifteenth century of our era the lamas of Tibet recognised no supreme head of their order, though for practical convenience the various monasteries were headed by abbots. Then one of the abbots of the Gáldán monastery assumed the title of head of the whole lamaistic priesthood, and was succeeded in this title by the abbot of the Tashi monastery, who strengthened his claim by declaring the grand lamas to be reincarnations of the semi-Buddhas. The fifth in succession of these grand lamas founded the hierarchy of Dalai lamas at Lhasa in 1640, and made himself master of the whole of Tibet. He assumed the title of Dalai Lama, but the grand lama of Tashi continued to occupy his state and privileges. A third grand lama, known as the Dharma Raja, holds sway in Bhutan.

Below these three grand lamas are the mass of the ordinary monks or lamas, who are grouped by monasteries under their own abbots. These abbots have no fixed precedence amongst themselves, but claim it on the accident of their reputation for personal sanctity, or by the temporal importance of the monastery over which they rule. The lamas consist merely of full monks and novices.

The Tibetan lamas are divided into three orders, all of which wear red robes (save the Zanskar order of the Geldanpá), though the Gelugpas exchange the customary red of the caps and scarves for yellow. These three orders are the Nyingpa, the Drúgpa, and the Gelugpa, which are not, strictly speaking, localised, though the Nyingpa are chiefly found in Ladakh, the Drúgpa in Bhutan, and the Gelugpa in Tibet. We have already seen that the Lahula lamas chiefly belong to the Drúgpa sect, which is non-celibate, and to this order belong the monks of the great monastery of Pín. The other four monasteries in Spiti belong to the Gelugpa sect—Kyi, Dángkar, Tábo, and Thág-  
gyúd, the last-named belonging to a sub-sect named Sakya, who wear red and yellow scarves, and who add a study of magic and incantation to their strictly Buddhist studies and duties.

The lamaistic hierarchy, like other similar systems that the world has seen, is not content merely with studying and promulgating its religion; it strives also for temporal power and its own profit, and to this end it uses its religious authority to keep a very strong hold over the people, and in pursuance of this policy is one of the greatest obstacles to all progress in Spiti. The country is admittedly barren and harsh to the last degree, but there is no doubt that with an extension of irrigation and an infusion of new ideas the country might support a much larger population than it does at present. But before this is possible the power of the lamaistic hierarchy must be broken.

The people are conservative and wedded to their old beliefs, and this conservatism is strengthened by the authority of the monks, who enforce it under the cloak of religion. No new tree may be planted, no watercourse dug, no new house built, without priestly sanction, and that is hard to obtain. The opposition to the erection of a sorely needed bridge some years back was so severe that Government was unable to build it until a show of force had been made to overawe the obstruction engineered by the priests. The net result of all this is an arrested growth of ideas and a stationary race of men ; for the monastic system is so designed that it deliberately restricts an increase in the population.

There is a close connection between the family life of the country and the monasteries. The constitution of the Spiti family has been justly described as a system of primogeniture, whereby the eldest son succeeds in the lifetime of his father. The eldest son of a family alone marries, and as soon as he has brought his bride home the father surrenders the estate and its responsibilities in his favour, and retires to a smaller house, with a small plot of ground for his maintenance. The younger sons of the family are sent as children to become monks in the family monastery, and there they live and die, with no hope of home or marriage, unless their elder brother should die before his son is ready to inherit ; in that case the next eldest brother emerges from his cell and takes over his brother's widow. Monogamy is the practice, a second wife being taken only when the first fails to produce a son. The result is to keep the population absolutely stationary. The number of households does not increase, and half the population lives unmarried, the younger sons as monks in their cells, the surplus women in their fathers' houses. The original intention of the system is evident—to restrict the population within the limits of what the country

can support. And the authority of the monks is backed by the inherited tradition of the lucky eldest sons, who naturally see no point in breaking up a system which secures to them the full possession of the family lands without the carving off of portions for their less lucky brethren. Hence every departure from custom is suppressed by the united influence of public opinion and religion, and there is no room for the germination of the new ideas and improved methods which might easily improve the capabilities of this remote land.

The monasteries have various means of support: they have their own endowments of land, with the resulting produce, and they have also assignments of the land revenue of the province, which are known as Bón; and after harvest the monks go round in parties from village to village, chanting hymns, enjoining the duty of charity, and collecting grain and other produce from every house—a procedure which brings in considerable stores to the monastery. Also the individual monks are not usually supplied with their necessities by the common funds of the monastery, but draw them from their own families; though on the occasion of festivals the monks mess together in the refectory at the expense of the monastery.

Mention must be made of the married monks of the Drúgpa sect who belong to the monastery of Pín, and marry in imitation of their patron saint, Guru-Rínpoch'é. The wives and families of these monks do not live in the monastery, but in small houses in the villages. Every one of the sons becomes a "Buzhen," which we may translate as a "strolling friar." They wander about in small parties, which act religious plays, perform various conjuring tricks, dance, and even do a little honest labour and trade in a small way.

There are a few nuns in Spiti, but they do not

live in monasteries as in Lahul, but in houses of their own.

One of the most celebrated monasteries in Spiti is that of Kyi, beyond Kibar, which is stated on the testimony of Csomo de Körös to have been founded in the eleventh century of the Christian era by a pupil of the celebrated Atisha, whose image may be found amongst the figures that line the altars in the temples. I made a special visit to see this monastery.

Thakur Abhai Chand accompanied me as interpreter to the monastery of Kyi, and we were lent ponies by the lombardars for our ride to the holy edifice. Kyi must be about three miles from Kibar ; the path lies along the slopes of the hill-sides and there is a peculiarly difficult piece of precipitous ground to be traversed, which has, however, been rendered possible by the banking up of the various zigzags amongst the rocks. It is, however, at the best, a break-neck path, and at times it seemed to me that a fervent and childlike trust in the surefootedness of the Spiti pony was rather an inadequate protection from the gorges that yearned below us. However we crossed safely on to better ground, and rounding a corner beheld the monastery.

No situation could be more picturesque or romantic. Before us lay a mighty circle of peaks in the far distance, clad in eternal snow, the vast panorama melting almost imperceptibly into the wide dome of the cloudless sky ; it had been a fitting boundary to the flatness of a mediæval world. Below us the slopes and gorges dropped away to the wide open valley of the Spiti river, which wound far below, a skein of silver threads twisted and tangled in its bed of gleaming boulder and white shingle, flowing swiftly towards the ring of peaks. Sharp and clear in the foreground was the silhouette of the monastery. The buildings clustered about a small peak and culminated in a

lofty point, like some magician's castle, dark, secretive, brooding, the work of man standing out in contrast to the open background of the work of God.

Our visit had been announced beforehand by a messenger, and as we dismounted at the foot of the ascent to the monastery a monk ran down to escort us up the peak. A steep path led up the slope to the foot of the buildings, which we entered by a wooden ladder set up to a door in the wall, some height from the ground. Within the door we found the abbot and several other monks, and the former threw a light scarf over my shoulders in token of greeting. The courtyard was filled with building materials, and a few labourers were passing through, carrying stones and plaster. Both monks and women were mingling in this work, in spite of the strict celibacy enjoined to the Gelugpa sect. The abbot apologised for the confusion, and explained that I should see the place at a disadvantage, as extensive repairs and alterations were in progress. And then without further ado I was hurried up a rough stair and through various doors into the main chapel, a large square room, in which the ceiling was supported by a double row of wooden pillars that divided the space into three aisles.

Along both sides of the central aisle were the lamas' seats, composed of small cushions lying on the floor, and I was led up to one of those nearest to the altar and invited to sit down, which I did cross-legged. The young Thakur sat on another cushion close to me. Across the aisle the abbot and two or three others also seated themselves, while the background was filled with a crowd of standing monks, who gathered out of curiosity to watch the proceedings.

Their dull woollen robes and inscrutable Mongolian faces were in keeping with the general air of dirt and

gloom which dominated the room. The scanty light that straggled in through the tiny windows was further obscured by dusty, painted banners that hung from the carved beams of the ceiling. To my left, across the head of the room, was the altar, a raised dais crowded with large painted figures representing Buddha and his various incarnations. In front of these were smaller figures of brass of Chinese origin. On a rack before the altar lay a few offerings and dully burning votive lamps, little points of light that failed to relieve the general gloom. The background faded into an obscurity from which peered forth the wicked leer and placid smile of saint and devil depicted in the frescoes on the wall in the quaint conventional but spirited style of Tibet.

Abbot and monk, all alike, fixed their eyes on the stranger within the gates and waited with the patience and the suspicion of the Mongol to see what was the purpose of his journey. Their close regard and some instinctive feeling of politeness prevented my staring too freely about the chapel, much as I should have liked to examine everything closely, and the general gloom hampered what politeness forbade. So I carried away no clear picture of that dark and ancient room ; it lingers vaguely in my memory as a place unreal, a dull picture from a book.

The interview that followed was constrained and difficult. All conversations through an interpreter are necessarily stilted, and in addition the lamas were very secretive and on their guard, convinced that there was some hidden purpose in my coming. So the conversation resolved itself more and more into a series of questions from my side, framed in a desperate endeavour to keep the ball rolling. At last I could think of no more to say, and asked the Thakur whether he could broach a subject on which I had already spoken to him. I was very anxious to

obtain a book from the monasterial library, and had suggested that if I made a donation to the common purse a hint might be dropped to the abbot that the presentation of a book might well return the compliment.

But apparently there was no need of so much tact : the Thakur suggested bluntly to the abbot that I wanted to buy a book. No offence was taken, but for the first time the proceedings showed a little animation, and there seemed to be general approval of the idea of converting into silver a work which could easily be replaced by the mere expenditure of a monk's time in making a fresh copy.

A young lama started to search the racks of books that stood to the right of the altar behind a kind of screen, and several were produced for my inspection. All of course were of the Tibetan type, bundles of loose leaves stamped or hand-written in the Bhotia script on both sides, and held between wooden boards. Eventually I purchased for four rupees a small squat book, greasy with age and handling. The covers were thick and carved, of black wood, and the pages were of stiff paper, stained a dark blue, inscribed in golden letters. It was just what I wanted, and in as casual a manner as possible I asked the abbot whether it was very old. But the import of my question was misunderstood and the abbot must have feared dissatisfaction with the bargain, for he hastily assured me that it was practically new.

After this business transaction I asked to be allowed to see the remainder of the monastery. Thereupon the lama who had met us at the gate, and had apparently constituted himself my special guide, seized me firmly by the hand and piloted me quickly through the dark living rooms and narrow passages till he halted outside a chapel, into which I was allowed to glance through the door. This, it was explained, was a Holy of Holies, which none but priestly

foot might enter. I was told afterwards that the reason for this prohibition was a series of obscene images in the room, but if this was correct the darkness prevented my seeing anything. In an undertone I asked the Thakur why the whole monastery was so dark and gloomy, and he replied that it was due to the absence of any form of glass or horn windows in the country ; the apertures had to be made as small as possible to keep out the snow in winter.

We passed through various rooms, very bare and almost devoid of furniture, which were the common rooms of the monastery, for the cells of the monks were in another building beyond the courtyard. In one room I saw a pile of the great clay masks, similar to those of Lahul, which are used in the ch'am, or devil dances. Apparently these dances are given in the monasteries all through the Tibetan area, and they represent the combat of the gods and demons. The demons had become too powerful and tyrannical over mankind, so the gods descended from heaven in the guise of strange beasts and fought and destroyed the enemies of mankind.

We finally emerged on the flat roof and gazed around at the magnificent view. A portion of the roof was also too sacred to be profaned by my alien foot, and I was not allowed to pay much attention to the yaks' tails that crowned the low parapet walls, so that no devil might pass that way. The four corners of the roof were to be surmounted by brazen finials of cylindrical shape, embossed with sacred texts in high relief, but of these only two were as yet in place.

The setting sun now warned me that there was no time to linger if we desired light by which to ride back along the mountain tracks ; so I reluctantly told the Thakur that we must leave. We took leave of the abbot and monks with due ceremony, and climbed through the entrance gate and down the



(Upper) A TYPICAL HOUSE IN SPITI AT 13,000 FEET

(Lower) IN A SPITI VILLAGE



ladder, attended to our horses by the monkish guide who had met us in the beginning. We mounted without delay and rode off, with many a backward glance at the monastery that stood up grim and black against the distant snows, now gilded by the dying sun.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IN PURSUIT OF BURHEL

FROM inquiries made along the road after our arrival in Spiti I had learned that the best ground for bурхел (*Ovis nahura*) would be on the mountains behind the village of Kibar, and as we journeyed down the Spiti Valley towards that place, corroboration was afforded by the number of bурхел horns which were to be seen on roadside shrines. For some reason the horns of animals, whether wild or domestic, are always a favourite offering at a shrine, and it may be that the custom has some connection with the very ancient and widespread act of sacrifice of a living animal, a sort of symbol of the larger act. As we approached Kibar the shrines would be found stacked with a dozen or so of bурхел heads, some of them of very good length. The men of Spiti are not shikaris, and there are practically no guns in the country, so these horns are picked up on the pastures by shepherds and graziers, and represent animals killed by snow leopards and the rigours of winter.

The people of Kibar, on inquiry, confirmed the news that bурхел were to be found on the high grounds above the village, and a man was produced who said that he knew the places where they lived and would take me to them—though it did transpire that his only claim to be considered a shikari lay in the fact that he had been the guide to the last official who had passed that way and had been unsuccessful in securing one of the mountain sheep.

However I made arrangements to take a couple of small tents up into the hills, and we started early

on the morning after our visit to the monastery of Kyi. The baggage of the camp was started off on three yaks, and the Thakur and I commenced the march on Spiti ponies.

There was, of course, no particular road to follow ; for the first half-mile we rode up a rough pathway that led to various of the village fields and to an enormous chorten erected on the hill-side overlooking Kibar. Then the path gradually vanished, and we moved up the hill-side under the guidance of the shikari. He was an uncouth figure ; a great loose gown of woollen material, with wide sleeves and open down to the cord that hitched it round the waist, hung down to about his knees, reaching over rough trousers of the same material. His horny, spreading feet were encased in shapeless leather shoes, and on his head was a sheepskin cap, of which the wool hung down in a great mass over each ear, framing the dirty wrinkled face, with its unusually bushy moustache. The grime and dirt of the fellow was his chief characteristic, reaching its zenith where the pig-tail rubbed unceasingly on the back of the woollen gown. With the shikari was a boy of about fifteen years of age, whom, from his close-cropped head, I judged to be a novice from some monastery ; he wore the same type of gown as the older man, but the woollen trousers and leathern shoes were replaced by long cloth boots, with soles of untanned leather. As we rode along I studied this precious pair, and at last could not resist inquiring from the Thakur whether it was not the custom of the people of Spiti to wash.

" Oh yes," said the Thakur, with a broad grin, " they are all washed twice : once when they enter life and once when they leave it."

By this time we were on ground very different to the road along the valley. It reminded me very strongly of the Scottish moors, save for the absence of heather. The hill-sides mounted slowly upwards,

with rolling slopes and hollows traversed by little burns that filled them with patches of bog. The barrenness of the valleys was ended : here were the rich mountain pastures on which the people graze their yaks and ponies in summer. There was no snow, though we could see great drifts of it farther ahead of us. A single rocky crag, the home of some snow pigeons, stood up to remind us of the precipices that had lately frowned upon our road, and far below to the left we looked down upon the deep trench cut by one of the tributaries of the Spiti river.

There was an air of desolation about the scene : a few bees buzzed around the flowers that here and there brightened the dark, sombre green of the Alpine plants ; occasionally we saw a horned lark running on the ground ; once we passed a flock of sheep and a few ponies. There was no other life, save a distant view of a kestrel beating up against the wind, and we slowly climbed the hill-side conscious of a silence that made us feel intruders in an empty world. We had travelled faster than the baggage yaks, and had left them well behind by the time that we reached the hollow which the shikari said was the best place to put the tents. It was sheltered from the wind by a steep stony ridge, and a little stream gurgled close at hand to supply the necessary water, while there was a patch of level ground sufficient for our needs. I estimated the altitude of this camp to be between 15,000 and 16,000 feet above the sea.

We hobbled the ponies and turned them loose to graze, and then sat down to rest and eat a snack of luncheon until the yaks arrived. At last they came into sight, plodding slowly up the hill-side, and we did not take long to have the baggage off on to the ground. A little planning and a little hard work and the tiny camp was ready, and old Mahomed Din was squatting as usual before his saucepans.

It was now about midday, but I intimated to the

shikari, through the Thakur's interpretation, that we should be off up the hills to start our search for bурхел. So we picked up our kit and left the camp. According to the shikari we were well on the bурхел ground, and any slope or nullah around us might hold them. So caution was necessary, and the first thing was to climb on to a high vantage-point and survey the ground.

Our tents were in a hollow on the southern face of a large ridge, from which branched off the stony slope that ran to the left of the camp. The top of the ridge was bare and stony, with here and there great drifts of rock and shale, covered in parts with stretches of snow.

We plodded slowly up the ridge in the angle between it and the stony slope until we reached the top of the latter and were able to look over it. Below was a very deeply cut ravine, from which, on the far side, rose a great plateau covered with snow and loose rocks, the face being buttressed up with a series of small cliffs. This looked promising ground, and we moved very cautiously all along the upper sides of the hill, spying out the various slopes and hollows that opened out in succession below us. As we moved along we saw various traces of snowcock, and in one place found the feathers where an eagle had feasted on one of these huge partridges. A party of Alpine choughs came up the wind to see the meaning of our stealthy movements, and they moved slowly along just over our heads, eyeing us with curiosity. Few birds can equal the grace and beauty of these choughs as they float along with outstretched wings and tail, the feathers quivering in the air with the pressure below them.

We found the tracks of bурхел on some bare soil, but these were not very fresh, and by the time that we reached the end of the high ground we were satisfied that no bурхел were in the immediate vicinity.

So we retraced our steps and moved back towards the main ridge, which we then proceeded to climb. It was a wearisome business ; the side of the ridge was not particularly steep, but we were at such an elevation that any exertion, other than moving over level ground, was very unpleasant, necessitating constant halts to allow of the recovery of my breath. However, in due course we reached a little gully that cut across the ridge, and this we cautiously proceeded to reconnoitre.

Beyond the ridge stretched a huge series of rolling grassy downs, in places bisected by deep-cut nullahs, in others broken by stony peaks and high patches of table-land, with snow resting in drifts in all the aspects sheltered from the direct rays of the sun. Beyond lay range upon range of snowy peaks, the ranges of the Parang Lá.

We started to examine the ground, but at first without result. Then suddenly we saw seven burlhel ewes moving in a small nullah below us, apparently disturbed by us, but not frightened. I watched them through the glasses as they moved round a shoulder of the hill, but could see no males. There were several lambs with their mothers, and they made a pretty picture as they disappeared round the corner. We lay still watching, and it was lucky that we did so, for a minute or two later some burlhel appeared on the slopes beyond the corner, and as we watched we learned that our ewes and lambs had been but the stragglers of a large flock of between thirty and forty burlhel. They moved across some open ground, travelling slowly, and disappeared over the crest of a rise. I could not spot any heads, but the distance was great, and it seemed impossible that there should be no old male amongst so many ewes.

As soon as the last animal disappeared over the crest we started off, making for a long deep nullah that ran towards the line of march of the burlhel,

hoping to cut across their path. The ground was very open, so a careful eye was necessary on the contours, which afforded our only cover. Speed, too, was essential, and that was a distressing difficulty as with pounding heart and sobbing breath we toiled along the broken ground, running down into the hollows and slowly climbing out of them again. At last we reached the crest that had been our objective, and I halted in its lee a few minutes to let my breathing die down. A hasty examination of the sights, a glimpse to make sure that the cartridge was in the chamber, I slipped back the safety catch and was ready. Then very cautiously, followed by the shikari, I crawled up to the crest of the rise. It was an anxious moment ! What would the last yard reveal ? The burhel feeding in easy range, the burhel still travelling on the shale slopes half-a-mile away ? At least it was necessary to look over and find out where they were. I wriggled up slowly, inch by inch, hugging the ground, seeing only the stones before me. One last push and my horizon suddenly widened : I was looking over the top—and there were the burhel within easy range !

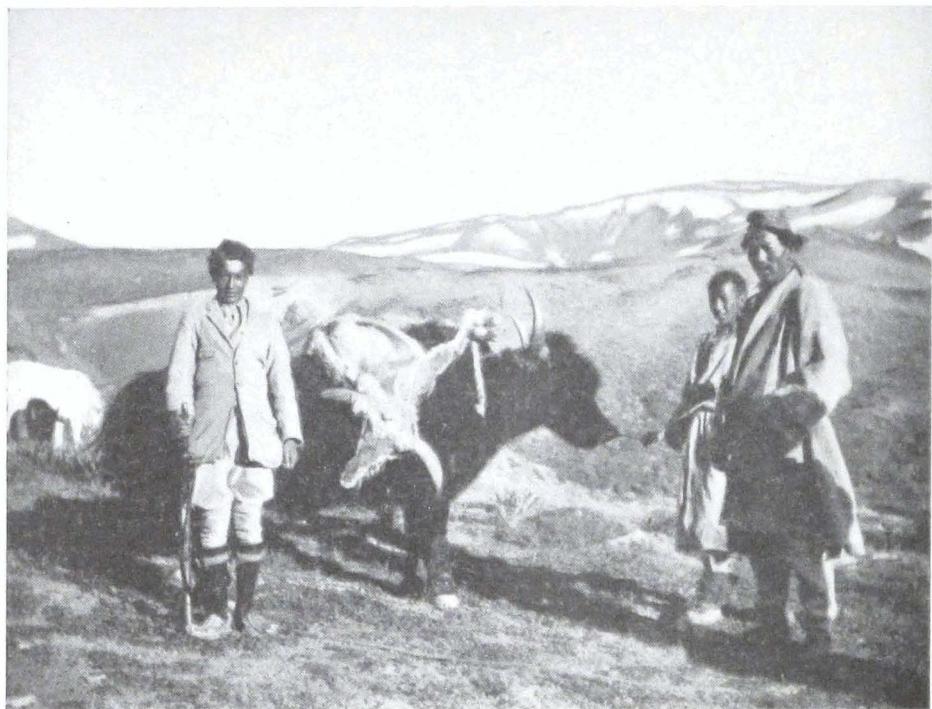
I was on the edge of a wide shallow hollow of the ground, an amphitheatre in shape, drained by a little rill that meandered down to the nullah that we had been following. The whole flock were scattered about in the hollow, cropping the scanty grass that lined it, and they were as yet oblivious of my presence. It was a pretty picture, but I dared not linger and enjoy it ; any moment I would be discovered, and the flock would gallop over the rise and be lost to sight. The nearest animals were only fifty yards away, but these were all ewes, and for a moment I could see no head ; but there was a ram, and only one, and he was feeding one of the animals farthest from me. I raised my rifle and with both elbows planted on the ground took careful aim and fired. With the report there was wild confusion. The

burhel started off, dashing together down the hollow, bunching as they went. I felt sure that I had heard the peculiar thud that marks the impact of a bullet, but the ram broke into a gallop with the others, and I could not fire again because of the ewes all round him. But it was not necessary, for within ten yards he staggered—a gallant recovery, another stagger, and he was down, and the flock swept on without their master. There was no need to fire again, as he lay still, so I turned my glasses on the flock and watched them as they climbed the long bank of shale across the valley and disappeared over the skyline. There was no second ram with them.

We walked across to the fallen burhel and, sitting on the stones beside him, recounted all the little incidents of the stalk. He had been broadside on, staring towards me suspiciously as I fired, and the bullet had entered the shoulder, passing out on the far side.

The day was drawing towards its close, so we addressed ourselves to the task of gralloching the burhel. This was soon done, and we started off to the camp, taking it with us—a work of some labour. However the Spiti shikari found sustenance on the road, for I was amazed to see him eating raw fragments of the liver of the dead animal. Later on, too, when the head was being cleaned, he made no ado about scraping out the brains with his finger and eating them.

Early next morning I was awakened with the news that there were some burhel on the stony ridge to the left of the camp, and hastily throwing on my clothes I went off to reconnoitre. It was easy ground for a stalk, and we had no particular difficulty in getting a good look at them through the glasses, but all proved to be females, so we left them alone. We found the fresh tracks of a snow leopard and her cub which had evidently been wandering round the



(Upper) BRINGING IN A DEAD BURHEL ON A YAK; SPITI, 16,000 FEET  
(Lower) FORDING A RIVER IN SPITI AT 13,000 FEET



outskirts of the camp during the night, and I ordered a goat to be fetched up from Kibar, in order that I might sit up for them that night. But by evening I was so tired with a long day on the hill-side that it was a relief to find the night too dark for my purpose.

There were a couple of stray ponies grazing in the vicinity of the camp ; I commandeered one of these, furnishing it with a rope bridle, to ease the climb up to the top of the ridge, which was to be the starting point of our day's search for burhel. This time we moved along the ridge, bearing always to the right, so as to search new ground which had not been disturbed by our sport of the previous day.

From up here we had a splendid view of miles of country, but for a long time could see nothing of any burhel. We gradually traversed the whole ridge to a small stony peak in which it ended, and as we climbed towards the top of this we came upon a covey of snowcock. I counted thirteen of the great birds, evidently some of them young birds of the year, as they slowly walked up amongst the rocks above us with a wary eye on our movements. It had been my intention to spy from the top of the peak, but I had no desire to send the snowcock hurtling down the nullahs with their loud alarm cry, attracting the attention of everything in sight and hearing, so we cautiously crept back and descended the far side of the peak. From here we could see four burhel down in a little ravine below us, but the glasses showed that all were ewes. We then moved on to a curious line of rocks which projected down the hill-side, the crumbling remains of some contorted strata. This formed a good vantage-point to spy from, and I crawled out along it to the end and peered round the last outlying rocks. To my amazement there were some burhel feeding on the hill-side level with me, about two hundred yards away ; they were in a little hollow below a big hump on the hill-side, which

had hidden them from us when we had been on the higher ground. My position was so exposed that I dare not use the glasses or linger to examine the flock for heads. I crawled hastily back behind the line of rocks, and under its cover moved well up the hill-side again, until the burhels were fully hidden by the lie of the ground. We then studied the line of our stalk. It looked as if it would be easy to move across the shallow ravine that divided us from the hump, beneath which were the burhels, and then come down over the top of it in easy range of them. We carefully searched all the slopes around with the glasses, to make sure that no other animals were in sight to give the alarm, and then started off. At first it was a mere matter of walking quietly along the hill-side, so well hidden were we by the ground, and as we walked I spied a couple of the rare Apollo butterflies quiescent in the grass. The shikari looked on in amazement while I stopped and placed them in papers in my cigarette-case—a proceeding beyond his comprehension in the middle of a stalk.

Then we reached the farther slope of the ravine and climbed it. Here greater caution was necessary; but I found another depression of the ground which lay behind the hump and drained down the far side of it, and this again afforded us excellent cover.

We knew that by now we must be fairly close to the burhels, but my momentary glimpse of them had not been sufficient for a very clear understanding of the ground or of the numbers of the flock. If they were scattered about, any outlying ewe might give the alarm. I crawled to the edge of the depression and looked down it, and to the level ground below, but there was nothing in sight. I drew back again and then crawled up the crest of the hump where it was lowest. Slowly, inch by inch, I wormed up to it and raised my head, only to duck as quickly as possible. My eyes had caught the brown curve of a

burhel's back as it grazed in a hollow some fifteen yards down the slope below me. It was an awkward moment ; discovery was imminent, yet I had not found out how many burhel were there and whether any were fit to shoot. But in shikar, as in life, one has to make instantaneous decisions and risk the fruit of toil and time on a moment's purchase. I decided to push myself rapidly over the brow and hope for a moment in which to pick my head and fire before the flock was off. The plan was successful up to a point. I scrambled into position for firing, and found two good rams amongst the bunch of sheep that were before me. I picked out one and fired at it before the stampede, but, as so often happens with a very close shot, my bullet went an inch or two over the shoulder of the ram, and he leapt off with the others, unharmed. However the next moment the miss was atoned for, and one of the rams crashed over like a shot rabbit as he galloped with the others madly along some level ground across my left front. The second shot had gone through his shoulder, killing him instantaneously.

The remainder of the flock disappeared in a rush into a deep-cut nullah and were lost to sight, but not before I had had time to see some more good heads in the flock of fourteen or fifteen animals. And here I made a mistake that perhaps cost me the head of another good ram ; for instead of listening to the shikari, who told me to run to the edge of the ravine, I waited, ready to fire at the burhel, which I felt sure would emerge from the nullah across the stony slope at its head. Had they done so I should have been ready for a shot that, though a long one, would not have been too difficult. But the burhel did not emerge where I expected, and I then obeyed the shikari and rushed to the edge of the nullah, a matter of some fifty yards. But just as I reached the brink my ankle twisted violently on the stones, and though I saved a fall and

reached the edge, the shock made me forget to reopen the safety catch. There were the burhels, a hundred yards below me in the nullah, standing in indecision, for they clearly had not discovered the direction whence came my first shots. I selected a ram, and taking careful aim pulled the trigger, only to feel the dead weight of the catch. An instant to lower the rifle and remedy the mistake, but the burhels had set off helter-skelter straight down the nullah, now fully aware of their danger and its origin. I fired once at one of the rams, but without success, and then held my hand, as it was useless to expect a clean kill at that difficult angle and distance. The rifle was exchanged for the glasses, and I watched the flock as they descended the slopes and crossed the open, their pace growing slower till they halted at the edge of a deeply cut cañon. Then one by one they disappeared into it, and I rubbed my ankle and thought sadly of the missed chance of a right and left, for the glasses showed me several very good heads amongst the remaining rams.

Then we walked back to the fallen ram and found that he bore an excellent head; my choice had not been at fault. A short rest and some refreshment and we were ready to clean out the carcass, to the great interest of a raven, who soon arrived from nowhere and perched on the crags around, croaking hoarsely at intervals and waiting for our departure and his meal.

It was decided that one of the men should go back to the camp and fetch a yak to take the dead burhel back; and while he went off I moved down the hill-side to the great cañon into which the burhel had disappeared. After a time I located them, but although they were obviously unwilling to leave the rocky cliffs that lined the place, I failed to get another, and at length started back for the long climb to cross the ridge to the camp.

All our efforts next day to find any burhel were quite useless, and we finally concluded that they must have moved off the country within reach of the camp, frightened by my success of the two previous days. So as time was short we struck the tents and moved back down to Kibar that evening, sad to leave the wide freedom and pleasant verdure of the rolling uplands.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AMONGST THE MONAL

THE side of the hill on which we were camped was still wrapped in the shadows of the early morning, and the sun had yet a long way to climb before he would illuminate it, when we started off, after an early breakfast, from the rough forest rest-house to climb the hill. For a short way our path lay over open ground, white with the sharp frost of a morning in early November. The puddles on the road were dry with ice, and a gun-barrel was an unpleasant thing to handle. But within I was warm with a pleasant glow of anticipation, for we were bound for the high forests, which repute declared to be the headquarters of monal. Several falls of snow had come and the snow-line was down to about 10,000 feet, while the shikaris corroborated what experience suggested—that the monal had moved down and would now be found collected together in the magnificent forests of spruce and silver fir that lay above us. The rest-house had been built at an elevation of 7000 feet in one of the most magnificent valleys that it will be my fortune ever to see. At the bottom ran a wide river, rushing tumultuously over a rocky bed, spurning and foaming amongst the huge boulders that time had thrown down in idle play. From its banks rose forests of pine and chestnut, giant trees that half veiled the crags and precipices as they climbed step upon step 2000 feet and more, till crag and precipice softened into Alpine pasture and gently swelling ridge ; these in their turn ended and gave place to the bare clear-cut peaks that rose into the cloudless sky, a vault

of blue. Beyond the peaks lay Spiti, remote, unchanging, too amply guarded by this line of rock and snow.

My two police orderlies and two Kanet shikaris were with me to carry the impedimenta of the chase and to show the best ground ; beaters were unnecessary, for all my faith was pinned in "Bunty," a black and white spaniel, a year old, whose education was now complete. One of the orderlies carried the rifle, in case we might have the fortune to come across a stray bear ; but big game was not the order of the day : it was the turn of the 20-bore, which had stood me in good stead for many long days on the hill-sides.

On my first arrival in the hills I had been told that a 20-bore would be quite useless for snowcock and monal, that a 12-bore and No. 4 shot were essential. But I had preferred to stick to the weapon that I knew, and persistently used the 20-bore with No. 5 shot and found no reason to change it. In the stiff climbing and heavy work that is the accompaniment of pheasant-shooting in the Himalayas every extra pound of weight tells, and the lightness of the 20-bore to carry more than compensates for the smaller charge and circle.

It was not long before we left the forest road and started to climb the rough cattle-paths that led up the side of a very steep spur ; 300 feet of this path warmed our circulation and removed all thought of the cold. It brought us to the edge of a patch of cultivation, and here we met a man and woman starting down the path with great bundles of leaves on their backs. We greeted them, and at the sound of our voices a koklas pheasant rose from the hill-side near by and flew like a rocket down the slope, unshot at. A further steep trudge and then the first call of a monal was heard, to cheer the labour. There is something very fascinating about the alarm whistle of the monal, which resembles the familiar call of the

curlew, and has the same indescribable something of wildness in its tone, suggesting spaces far from the haunts of men.

The steep slope ended and we emerged on to an open glade on its summit which was fairly level and was covered with the dry and lifeless remains of the grass and balsam that had grown there in the summer. From here a more or less level path struck off to the right round a spur, and this we followed amongst the pines. Suddenly Bunty winded a pheasant and followed the scent up a little ravine in a fold of the hill. Making sure that the bird would have moved up over the slope to fly down on the far side, I ran round the corner of the path to be ready for the shot ; but my calculations were wrong, for two koklas rose out of the ravine and flew up into the pines, settling for a moment and then flying down the hill-side before I could get below them.

The next small ravine was white with snow, except down the centre, where a little stream had melted it away. Again a whiff of scent and Bunty dashed up the steep bank with an excited bark. I heard an agitated "quark, quark," as two more koklas ran before him, rustling over a bank of dry leaves and debris, and then they rose and dashed down the hillside out of shot.

We climbed a little higher up the same ravine, and Bunty repeated the performance ; but this time there were monal at last, and five of the great birds rose high above us and dashed down amongst the pines. It was a long shot, but I fired both barrels at a fine old cock, who carried on hard hit out of sight amongst the tops of the pines ; and though he must have fallen, it was impossible to judge the spot within half-a-mile. I reloaded one barrel hastily just in time for a single hen who rose at the first reports and flew down over me, to fall with a broken wing into the little ravine, whence Bunty and a shikari retrieved her after an

exciting chase, slipping and struggling amongst the snow.

The blank was broken, and these three shots had helped me to estimate the pace of the monal and learn how far forward it was necessary to fire ; for their size leads to an underestimate of the great pace with which they fly down-hill.

We packed the bird away and resumed the climb, which brought us on to a second "tharch," as these open glades in the hill forests are called. As I crossed this another hen monal flew up from behind a little hillock, where she had been digging in a hollow, and gave me a very easy shot, which was taken advantage of. At the shot a number of other monal rose from a nullah to the left and went away out of range.

And now we were well on to the monal ground, but the strong scent of the birds and their excited calls were too much for a young dog. He rushed ahead as we were negotiating a terribly steep piece of hill-side, and I listened to bird after bird rising and dashing down amongst the pines ahead of us, momentarily seen amongst the great trunks as they passed. At one I fired a long shot through the trees, but with no effect. With some difficulty we secured the now thoroughly excited dog and put him on a lead before moving on again.

Here the ground grew more open ; the pines began to give place to clumps of rhododendron, and large patches of hill-side were bare of trees—sure sign that we were nearing the limit of tree-growth, above which it was hardly worth going.

We cautiously edged round some open ground, on which were lying great drifts of snow, that recorded the passage of a fox. Where the ground was free of snow it was all pitted with the marks where monal had dug for the hard tubers on which they feed, but there were no birds in the open, and those that Bunty

had disturbed from the edge of the forest were probably responsible for the digging.

The sun was now high in the heavens and we felt his warmth unpleasantly as we climbed, with the glare from the snow in our eyes. We cast to the right, but the ground here grew too steep and unpleasant, so we changed direction and moved to the left again to get below some great thickets of the rhododendron which I felt sure must harbour some birds concealed. Bunty was released and at once ran up into the thicket. Several monal rose, but flew down out of shot, and then an old cock broke cover to my left and skimmed low over down the hill-side, his lovely plumage gleaming in the sunlight. It was a long shot, but I held a yard ahead of him, and some pellets in the neck ended his career. Five hens at once rose to my right and a very similar shot brought one of them to earth. Her companions continued their headlong flight down the hill-side into the forests, all except one, which rose up and settled at a great height from the ground in a solitary clump of pines.

I moved forward so as to get directly below the clump, and then sent a man into it to flush the bird ; but instead of flying down towards me she flew straight along the hill-side above. I saluted her with both barrels, but might just as well have saved my powder.

That was the last of the monal we could find on this particular slope, so we halted for a rest ; and as the men gathered together for a smoke and chat, I munched an apple and enjoyed the view.

We were near the top of one of the great buttress ridges that run from the Spiti border. Where we sat patches of pine and rhododendron alternated with wide slopes of grass, on which lay drifts of the first snows of winter, where their depth and position had



THE HAUNTS OF THE MONAL PHEASANT

(Upper) IN SUMMER

(Lower) THE FIRST DRIFTS OF SNOW



preserved them from the sun. Below lay the unbroken forest, a sea of pine tops clothing the steep sides of the ridge.

Across the valley some imposing peaks glittered in the sunlight, snow on their crests, and glaciers in the high ravines, the whole grouped about some enormous valleys which I knew to be the haunt of burhel and snow leopard. In one of these valleys there are some famous springs of hot water which would seem to have connection with the sacred springs of Mani Karan, down in the Parbatti Valley.

Ever and again my eyes dwelt on the dead monal which lay at my feet. The last pair killed were perfect specimens, as they had fallen on to the grass from no great height, and these were carefully packed for stuffing. It is difficult to get perfect specimens of monal by legitimate shooting. The birds fly so fast and high, and are so heavy, that when they are brought crashing down on the hill-side the feathers are usually knocked off in great lumps, so as to leave bare patches, even if the skin is not actually torn or the body split with the force of the fall.

Although monal is usually the term for both sexes amongst British sportsmen, it is used by the hill men only for the male bird, the female being called karari. The male is a gorgeous bird of metallic plumage, green and reddish copper about the head and neck, the back and wings a lovely purple and blue; the under surface is black, the rump pure white, and the broad, stiff, partridge-like tail is a bright yellowish chestnut. A bare eye-patch of bright blue and a metallic green crest of lanceolate feathers springing from the centre of the forehead complete the varied colours of a bird which has been compared to a humming-bird enlarged to the size of a fowl.

The hen is a mottled brown bird with a white

throat and the blue eye-patch of the male. The young male closely resembles the female, but may be distinguished by a black throat and some metallic feathers on the tail coverts.

Adult males weigh up to five and a half pounds, and hens a little less — between four and five pounds.

After this rest we worked along the top of the ridge, but soon found this useless, as any birds found were below us before they rose, and it is no use shooting at the tail of a monal flying down-hill. Snow also was uncomfortably deep along here, so we decided to move down-hill again. I went straight down the hill-side for a hundred yards, leaving a couple of the men to beat out a patch of pines above me ; but though there were some monal in here, they flew into the pines and did not afford me a shot. As I crossed an open patch of snow a whiff of scent reached Bunty, and he ran into the edge of the forest and put up four or five birds below the brow, which went off down the hill unseen save for an instant.

We then entered the forest, and I worked down along the slope, leaving a couple of men to walk above me. There were no more birds here, however, until we reached a small deep nullah, well clothed about its edges with young firs and saplings. It looked a promising spot, and there were evidently some monal in it, while I heard the squeak of a koklas. The going was bad, however ; the ground was steep and a tangle of fallen boughs was deep in snow. I started to get into position, but before I was ready the koklas rose and flew down at a tremendous pace, straight for me, but screened by a tree, so that I was unable to see it until a yard or two from my face. An endeavour to turn and fire after it had passed was ineffectual ; my shot went yards wide, and I myself collapsed heavily into the snow.

At the noise numbers of monal rose on the far side

of the nullah, screened from even a long shot by the trees. Then a magnificent old cock rose fifty yards above me and came sailing down straight over my head, wings and tail outstretched, moving without apparent effort. His approach looked so slow and stately that there appeared no necessity to fire ahead of his beak. Bang went the right barrel, bang the left, and once again I had learnt that big birds fly faster than they seem to—a lesson that one learns and forgets time after time. Sadly I watched him sail on out of sight, with no apparent quickening of his speed to acknowledge my salutes.

There were no more birds left in this ravine, so I left the men on the "tharch" that we had now reached, while I took Bunty and a Kanet into a large nullah beyond it. There were a lot of monal here, but they flew down the opposite side, rather too far away. A couple of shots drew feathers, but they should not have been fired. I crossed the nullah in case any more birds should follow the others, as Bunty was working on a line above me, but the only bird remaining in the place of course flew down over the spot that I had just quitted. I crept on through the pines beyond the nullah and an occasional monal was seen or heard to rise and fly down through the forest, whistling in alarm, but I missed the only one that offered anything of a chance. On the far side of this patch of pines I turned and took a lower line back through them. Here the ground was rather steep and rocky, and we had to pick our way ; at one point we had to thread through a small defile below a great square rock, and the Kanet squeezed through before me, thereby spoiling an easy chance at a bird that flew off the top of the rock where it had been hiding in a hollow. However a moment later compensation came in the shape of a young cock, who flew down high over my head and was killed fair and square with a charge of No. 5 in the head. He crashed

straight into the trunk of a silver fir, smashing his beak to jelly.

We retrieved the bird and worked along nearly to the edge of the tharch on which the men were resting, when a koklas was heard in the nullah beside it. Quietly I got into the centre of the nullah, and the Kanet went up the slope to flush the bird. It rose at once, but flew straight out into the open across the tharch and gave me no chance to fire a shot.

Then followed lunch on the tharch, and a pleasant bask and smoke in the sun. It was strange how quiet the forests were : no sound of the roaring streams below reached up to this height ; no wind broke the stillness of the trees. The occasional call of a nut-hatch and the grating cries of a pair of nutcrackers who were feeding in the pine tops below me were the only sounds that broke the stillness ; for the nonce even the monal were silent, and my men slumbered in the sunlight, while I sat still and watched the snows.

At last I woke the men, and we gathered up our belongings and resumed the chase.

On the far side of the tharch we entered a patch of particularly large firs and walked along a rough forest path until Bunty caught a scent above. I let him follow it up, and at once the wood was alive with excited whistles as a number of monal rose, a hundred yards above, and dashed down through the pines : it was an exciting moment. The ear told me they were coming, and coming fast, but the eye could not pick them up until the last moment, so thick were the trees. A momentary glimpse of a bird above me and I fired right through the boughs of a pine, then turned and fired at a second bird which crossed an open patch of sky above me. This at least was a clean miss, and so I thought was the first shot, but I loaded with all speed as a third bird had settled in a pine-tree some yards above us. It was flushed again

by one of the men, but flew on the wrong side of the trees for me, and my cartridge might just as well have been saved. Then the shikaris told me that the first of the three birds was lying dead in a hollow below us, and thence we duly retrieved it.

Ahead of us the pines ended in a sharply cut nullah, the sides of which were fringed with heavy undergrowth, while open ground lay beyond. The sun had not penetrated here, and ice still lingered in the hollows by the stream and hoar-frost along the path. It looked a promising place and there were a lot of monal there, for we could see them flying down the hill-side across the stream and from the slopes below us, while the forest resounded with their agitated whistles. But they had been thoroughly disturbed by the shooting, and not a single bird gave me a chance. We could hear the birds calling as they settled all about the hill-side below, so I climbed down a hundred yards and took a line back below the pines. But this was only to find that the majority of the monal were calling from lofty perches in the great pines, from which they sailed out into mid-air above and across the nullah, far out of shot. At last it was clear that there was no hope of more sport unless we could get on to fresh ground where the birds had not been disturbed ; but time was against us, and it would have meant a long and stiff detour to do this. So I reluctantly decided to work down towards the rest-house, trying for koklas on the way. We were soon out of the pines and into the area of deciduous trees, and here we found dry leaves so thick on the ground that it was impossible to move quietly. There were a number of koklas pheasants about, and Bunty soon got on to them. But all scent came from below, as is usual in the hills after midday ; and though I fired a few shots at koklas as they rose below me and dashed down through the trees, I soon admitted that it was unfair on the birds, which if hit could

never be recovered. So we gave up the endeavour and found a cattle track to take us down to the valley. A steep climb down and we reached the rest-house, well enough satisfied with the bag of six monal.

## CHAPTER XV

### A CAMP IN THE SOLANG NULLAH

BELLOW the southern crest of the Rhotang range, opposite to Sissoo and Gondla in Lahul, and above Manali in Kulu, there is a huge nullah known as the Solang. It is traversed by the Solang river, which falls into the Beas, some miles above Manali. The head of the nullah merges into the Rhotang chain and is a waste of rock and snow, though the hill men occasionally cross by that route from Kulu into Lahul. To the west of the valley runs the great range that separates Kulu from Bara Bengahal, and the crests of this range, too, are bare and rocky, and carry snow for the greater part of the year. But lower down the valley is clothed with the most wonderful forests of pine and chestnut, and alder-trees grow on the banks of the Solang river. The Solang nullah is noted for its big game. Both the red and black bears are found within the forests ; thar occupy the rocky slopes where snow and forest meet ; ibex are to be found in fair numbers on the high ground about the Rhotang chain ; and there is always hope of leopard, goral, musk-deer, and various kinds of small game.

It was in 1910 that I first saw the Solang nullah. I had been only six months in India and had seized the first opportunity of leave to go up into Kulu in hopes of some shooting. Two brother officers, equally new to the country, were with me, and one of them was the grandson of the late General Osborn, who was then residing at Naggar. This circumstance had turned our attention to Kulu, and we went straight up to the house that General Osborn had built at

Naggar. Osborn House has since been purchased by Government as the official residence of the Assistant Commissioner posted in charge of the Kulu subdivision.

On General Osborn's advice one member of the party went off into the Humpta nullah. The other man and myself decided to try the Solang nullah, and started off there on the 20th June, with a couple of small tents. That evening we marched only a short stage and pitched our camp in the little village of Juggutsukh, in the courtyard of the temple there. Juggutsukh is said to have been the original capital of Kulu, and twelve generations of rajas ruled from there before the headquarters of the dynasty was changed first to Naggar and then to Sultanpur. The very ancient little temple, with its carvings of wood and stone, is well worth examination, but at the time we were more concerned with the multitude of flies that descended in a swarm upon our camp and nearly drove us to distraction. Before the rains commence in early summer the flies are one of the chief drawbacks to travel in Kulu.

Next day we moved on to Manali, and there halted to make arrangements for our transport into the Solang nullah. Coolies were collected, and we moved off early on the following day into the nullah. The shikaris had selected a very pleasant spot for the site of our camp, which was pitched under some alder-trees in the bed of the valley. Here the ground was fairly open and level; clumps of alders dotted the level ground, and various streams of water ran down through luxuriant pasture. Close to the tents started the slope of the sides of the valley, and with it the forests, in which we were to look for bears. It was arranged that my companion should have the left side of the valley, and I took the right. We each had a local shikari, who outlined the plan of campaign. The usual custom in Kulu is to look for bears in the

very early morning, from dawn until about an hour or two before noon, and again in the evening from about three o'clock until dark. This covers the periods of the bears feeding on the "tharches." In the early morning there is a chance of finding them before they leave the feeding-grounds of the night and retire for their midday rest in some hollow tree or cave, and in the evening they often arrive on the tharches before darkness sets in.

After we had pitched the tents and settled comfortably into camp we had a good tea, and then set out to prospect our shooting ground. My first discovery was that ordinary English boots would be no use for climbing on these steep hill-sides, dry and parched with the summer sun, and waiting for the monsoon to wake a new growth. The leather soles became polished like glass, and I slipped and fell so incessantly that at last I took off the boots and continued in my stocking feet. The next day I procured the grass shoes that the Kulu men wear, and they proved very satisfactory, worn over ordinary socks. They are uncomfortable until the feet become accustomed to them, but the twisted cords of grass grip rock and grass alike and never slip ; they wear out very quickly however, seldom lasting more than a couple of days.

The next discovery was a good green tharch in the midst of the forest which was scarred with the marks of where a bear had dug for roots on several occasions ; the last was so recent that the leaves of the plants disturbed had hardly had time to wither. The sight cheered me, as it proved that there was at least one bear in the near vicinity of the camp.

It was very cold and cheerless when I rose before dawn next morning, and sat huddled with a blanket over my khaki shooting kit to eat breakfast by the light of a hurricane lantern. But hopes were high and I was eager to be off, so half-cold porridge and

tough chops went down with an appetite that better food and better circumstances have often failed to evoke. Soon I was ready, and with a last look to see that my rifle was in satisfactory condition I handed it to the shikari to carry, and started off to climb the hill-side.

Dawn had broken, and in the half-light we climbed slowly up in silence amongst the great tree trunks, here moving over the dry and slippery debris beneath the largest trees where no undergrowth might live, there pushing our way through great beds of balsam, the stems crackling harshly under our feet. We went first of all to the tharch discovered on the previous evening, but there were no fresher traces there, and it clearly had not been visited during the night. Then the shikari took me to another and a larger tharch that he knew of, hidden in a deep gorge and surrounded by thick jungle—an ideal spot for a bear to feed. That one had been here recently was evident from the new and plentiful traces of its activities, and in the jungle around we found that it had turned over a number of stones in search of grubs and beetles.

We could not find the bear itself however, and in due course descended to the camp for the midday rest. It was pleasant here in the sunshine beside the little mountain stream, whose icy waters murmured and sparkled past the tent. The grassy slopes round about the camp were covered with wild strawberry plants, and we gathered quantities of the ripe berries, squashing them up with milk and sugar in colourable imitation of the "strawberries and cream" of previous summers at home. Birds I might not shoot, for fear that the report even of the little collecting gun would disturb nobler game; but a butterfly net is a noiseless weapon, and I took toll of the butterflies that fluttered and rested in the glades beneath the alders. The lovely little Queen-of-Spain fritillary was common amongst the strawberry plants, while the

black-and-white Neptis slowly floated about the damp ground through the trees, with its stately characteristic flight.

An early tea was disturbed by a shower of rain, and for a while it looked as if we should not be able to go out that evening ; but the rain cleared off, and the shikari and I started off on our round. The first tharch was visited and again drawn a blank. Then slowly and carefully we crept through the jungle to look at the second tharch. At last it was visible, and the shikari motioned to me to halt while he crept up to a higher place that commanded a better view of the ground. From there he beckoned, and there was meaning in his gesture. I joined him, and he whispered to me to look through the glasses and examine a dull brownish lump which somehow did not seem to be a stone. I undid the strap, but before the glasses were out of the case the lump moved and put up a head. We had found the bear of the tharches, and luck had decreed that it was a red bear. I studied it through the glasses and was soon satisfied that the animal was quite unsuspicuous of our presence, for it continued to rout about amongst the herbage, finding and eating small objects.

With the impatience of his kind the shikari wanted me to shoot at once from where we lay—a distance of over one hundred and fifty yards ; but I saw no point in risking so long a shot with my small-bore rifle when the circumstances were all favourable for securing the close shot which would enable me to be fairly certain of a vital hit.

We accordingly moved down out of sight of the bear and threaded our way through a thicket which lay below the tharch, moving as quickly and as quietly as might be. But the ground was covered with dry leaves and fallen sticks, and time and again my heart was in my mouth as a false step led to the snap of a rotten twig and the crackle of a leaf—

sounds that imagination and excitement magnified a hundred-fold.

At last we reached the edge of the tharch and slowly peered over it, but there was nothing to be seen save some large stones amongst the herbage ; the ground was humpy and with many hollows in it, so that we could not command the whole area of the tharch. We crept out from the thicket on to the open ground, but still there was nothing to be seen. Silence filled the glade, and round us the forest hemmed it in as with a living wall.

By this time I was bitterly regretting my refusal to take the long shot from where we had first seen the bear ; there seemed no doubt that it had heard our approach and gone off into the jungle.

The bare-footed shikari noiselessly climbed on to one of the stones and, gradually straightening his height, peered cautiously around, only to look down again at me, as I stood with the rifle ready in my hands, and shake his head. As he did so our taut nerves were rudely jarred by an old cock monal, who burst out of the tangle of grass in which he had been hiding and flew down the hill-side, shrieking his alarm call as he went. The silence settled down again on us as a cloud, and I felt that hope was gone.

However we crept a little farther out into the middle of the tharch and mounted on to a large flat rock that was lying there ; and there just beside me was the bear !—half hidden in the mass of ferns and balsam that clothed a hollow in the ground. His head was down amongst the stems, routing and smelling for food, though his shoulder and back were clear to view broadside on.

The shock of the surprise set my heart hammering with excitement, but there was no time to lose. I nudged the shikari, who was looking in the other direction, oblivious of the bear, and raising my rifle I took aim just behind the shoulder and fired. At the

report the bear gave a tremendous squirm and the most grotesquely surprised face came out of the balsam and twisted towards me. I fired again on the instant, and the animal fell, but the shikari yelled to me to shoot a third time, and I did so, as we were at too close quarters to risk a mistake. But the third shot was not needed, and it was well that this was so, as in the excitement I fired too high and missed the animal clean.

The bear had fallen just where it stood, without a movement beyond that first frantic squirm and a twitch or two of the limbs as it lay there. We picked up a couple of small stones and threw them at the body, but there was no response, and it was evident that the bear was dead. We went up and examined it: the first bullet had gone clean through the body behind the shoulder, apparently taking the heart in its passage; while the second had entered the neck at the base of the skull. Either wound alone had been a fatal one. I paced the distance between the dead bear and the stone from which I had fired, and found it to be a matter of twenty-two paces. The bear was a male and the coat was in first-rate condition, very thick and long, in colour a light golden yellow along the back and browner underneath.

The sun had set and darkness was close at hand, while we were far from the camp. We accordingly covered the carcass with my mackintosh coat, weighed down with stones to keep off foxes, and left it to be fetched by the coolies next morning.

Next morning I did not go out on the hill, but left the shikari to bring in the dead bear, and we spent the morning removing and cleaning the skin. It was a tough job removing it, and much time was occupied in cleaning off all fat and flesh before the skin was stretched with cords on a rough square frame that we made from some saplings. The inner surface of the skin was then thoroughly rubbed with wood ash,

which is a most valuable dressing, and the frame was laid in the shade to dry. At night-time it was placed in between the flies of the tent to preserve it from the danger of wandering dogs or rats.

D., my companion, had also found a bear on the previous night. He had spent the evening sitting over a likely tharch, and had elected to leave at the identical moment that a black bear had arrived. They met face to face over a small rise, to their mutual astonishment, man and bear. The bear recovered his wits quicker than the man, and was off into the forest before a shot was fired. This proved to be the only bear that my companion saw during our stay in the valley.

That evening and the next morning I was out again in the forests without seeing anything larger than a big hill fox who was making for home after his night's hunting. Something about the shikari's behaviour at last convinced me that he did not intend me to secure another bear, and by nightfall I was certain of the fact, when he wasted the whole evening by taking me off to visit a tharch which was crowded with sheep. This must have been intentional, as the whereabouts of the sheep are well enough known in the neighbourhood. The reasons for this behaviour were not clear to me. I had made the mistake of tipping the man on the death of the bear, and it was possible that this was the cause of his behaviour. He may have thought the reward too small and so have determined to be revenged on me; on the other hand it may have been too large; for the men of Kulu are inveterately lazy, and once satisfied that they have earned enough for the nonce they like to lounge through the pleasant summer days until work and action again become imperative. Possibly also he thought that one bear from a nullah, and that a red bear, was sufficient for any sportsman, and he would keep the rest intact and so save himself from

trouble in showing sport to the next man who hired his services.

Inquiry from the servants so completely confirmed my suspicions that after supper I called up the shikaris to the tent and cursed them with the utmost fluency of which my Urdu was capable, filling in the blanks with many a homely English word. One way and another it sunk into their brains that further trifling would not be tolerated, and when we set forth again at dawn next morning there was a very different atmosphere about the proceedings.

There was a second bear living in the vicinity of the camp, for we continued to find fresh signs of digging on the tharches, but search as we might it seemed impossible to come across him. I should have liked to take the camp higher up the nullah to search for thar and ibex, but the monsoon was at hand, heralded by vast masses of solid cloud which hung about the hill-tops all day long, and would have made stalking almost impossible. Time also was growing short, and at last the day came when I had to send out orders for the coolies to arrive early the next morning to move the camp back to Manali.

That evening we went out for the last time, more as a duty than with any hope of finding the bear who had so successfully eluded our search. The shikari and I concealed ourselves in some bushes to watch one of the best of the tharches, while a second hill-man was sent to watch from a spur which commanded a view of a big nullah behind us. It was not altogether pleasant watching the tharch. The view before us was superb—great forests stretched all up the farther side of the Solang Valley, mile upon mile, to the precipices that fringed the snow-clad crest of the Rhotang. There was a certain amount of bird-life to watch ; laughing thrushes chattered and fussed in the bushes around us, mostly unseen, but now and again passing momentarily over the field of vision,

with their clumsy flight and trailing tails. A small tree across the tharch resounded with the busy work of a Himalayan pied woodpecker, who was subjecting the half-decayed trunk to a minute examination. Most interesting of all were a couple of woodcock who at intervals flighted along the hill-side high above the tharch. But the midges gave us no peace, and it was very difficult to sit still and submit to their ministrations.

Our vigil was broken by the watcher above, who suddenly appeared and beckoned to us with urgency. We left the shelter of the bushes and hastened up to him, to be conducted to a little spur that commanded a view of a great wide ravine, 1000 feet and more below. The bottom of the ravine was a waste of boulders, through which ran a fast mountain torrent, and the sides were strewn with a great tangle of pine trunks, the debris of a recent landslip, the scars of which could be seen up the whole of the mountain-side. Nothing was visible below, though the man declared that he had seen a black bear moving along the bed of the ravine. We sat still, watching for a time, and at last saw a tiny black spot moving about far below us, looking like a small black dog. A glance through the glasses confirmed it was a bear, but we waited long enough to satisfy ourselves that it was going to feed on a small tharch visible down in the bed of the nullah.

Then we started off down the side of the mountain. It was fairly well screened by trees, so no particular caution was necessary and speed was essential, as sunset was drawing near ; so we went as fast as might be, scrambling, slipping, falling, down the steep incline, till at last we reached the bottom of the ravine and halted on the edge of the open ground. Cautious observation showed that the bear was still feeding on the tharch, and we decided to approach it, not on the level, but over a steep bank covered with thick jungle that ran out into a tongue on the edge

of the tharch. We crossed the open stretch of boulders under cover of the bank and climbed up on to the little ridge and crept along it. As we did so I suddenly caught sight of the bear below us, a little way ahead, where it had moved from the tharch. It moved again and was hidden by some foliage. We hastily slipped back to the farther side of the ridge and crept along under its cover till I judged that we were opposite to the spot, and then slowly and with infinite caution I crept up the slope amongst the undergrowth till the crest was reached. Here there was a great tree trunk which afforded excellent cover, and I peered over it. The far side of the bluff was a steep bank, cut away by the passage of flood water, and I looked down almost straight on to the bear, who was in the bed of the nullah, busily scraping out a hole in the ground. It was an easy shot—fifty to seventy yards at the most. I slipped back the safety catch and with the sights in the lowest notch took careful aim between the shoulder blades and fired. My aim was true and the bear rolled over to the report, disabled and unable to get away, though its frantic struggles carried it a few yards as it floundered about amongst the rocks and balsam. I shot again, but could find no vital spot in the writhing body. At last its struggles ceased and it lay still on its back, moaning slightly and twisting its head and forepaws. Anxious to put it quickly out of pain I ran down to the trunk of a fallen pine which stuck up amongst the boulders, and climbing out on this natural pier above the fallen animal put a couple of bullets into its chest from a close range. Its troubles were over and we climbed down and examined the body. The bear was a female in very good coat and condition, but so old that the teeth were heavily worn down. From nose to tail in a straight line she measured 4 feet 8 inches.

It was growing dark and a light drizzle of rain was commencing, so there was no time to lose. If we

could get the body across the bottom of the nullah, with its tangle of boulders and tree trunks, before darkness fell, there would be no particular difficulty in getting it back to the camp, which was only a short distance away round the bottom of the spur from which we had descended.

The man who had first seen the bear was a great strong fellow, accustomed, like all hill-men, to carrying heavy loads on his shoulders, and he volunteered to carry the bear across the nullah. I doubted his ability to lift the load but told him to try, and he tied up the body with the pack-rope that all hill-men carry. Then the shikari and I helped him to get the load on to his shoulders, and with a mighty heave he started off, to my intense amazement. The most difficult part of the business was the crossing of the stream, with its rough boulders and strong current; but here the shikari and I waded one on each side of the man, steadyng him and helping him across. Then the shikari hastened off to the camp to fetch coolies, while we dumped the dead bear on the edge of the ravine and waited for their arrival.

The last gleams of light faded off the peaks and darkness settled on the hills; heavy clouds overcast the sky, and soon we were waiting in a black darkness that could almost be felt. Once we heard the bark of a fox, and for a few seconds a pair of flying squirrels moaned, settling some dispute in the pines on the hill-side above us; otherwise there was a heavy silence, emphasised by the roar of the stream in its passage down the nullah.

Our vigil was broken by a gleam of light amongst the tree trunks and then the shikari arrived with several coolies and lanterns. The bear was trussed up on to a long pole, and we started off to camp with the pleasant fatigue that marks the end of a successful day.

Time has not effaced the picture of that journey

back to camp—the sparkle of lanterns, the gleam on moving legs, the dimly seen bodies of the men and their heavy burden, and all around great aisles of giant tree trunks, merging into darkness: light and darkness, the chatter of men, the silence of the forests—a picture of contrasts, limned by the brush of a master painter.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE VALLEY OF KULU

No account of Spiti and Lahul would be complete without some mention of the valley of the Beas in Kulu, through which they are ordinarily reached.

Kulu consists of two main valleys : the valley of the Beas, with its water-sheds from the rise of the river on the Rhotang Pass to the Larji gorges, whence it passes into the independent state of Mandi ; and the valley of the Parbatti, which rises on the Spiti range, and with its side streams drains into the Beas at Bhuin. The Larji gorges are situated at an elevation of a little over 3000 feet above the sea, and there is a gradual rise through the main valley until it ends somewhere above Manali, about 6500 feet. The side valleys and their containing ranges are all at higher elevations, while some of the peaks rise up to a height of 21,000 feet ; but it will be realised that Kulu is a considerably lower area than Lahul, while in character and climate it may be described as truly Himalayan. The scenery is varied and very beautiful, so much so that Kulu is sometimes described as a rival to Kashmir, though it lacks the wide expanses and the broad lakes that some consider the finest beauties of that lovely country.

There are two main avenues of approach to Kulu. It may be reached from Simla by the Hindustan-Tibet road through Narkanda and Saraj, but this implies a road-march of over a hundred miles from the railhead at Simla—a matter of expense and time. This route entails the crossing of the Jalouri Pass (10,000 feet) between Inner and Outer Saraj, with

the implication therefore that the road is virtually closed by snow during the winter months. In summer there is no more lovely spot than the Jalouri Pass ; the ridge is bare along the summit, its verdant grassy slopes thrown into relief by the wind-swept Kharshu oaks that stretch in patches of dull brownish green along the sides. Below these the pines commence, and I have seen no more wonderful stretch of forest than the great basin below the northern side of the Pass. The grandeur of these forests is too impressive to be described—a rippling mass of living green of every shade, thrown in a dense mantle over all the ridges and valleys. The beds of mauve iris about Shoja equal any that I have seen in Kashmir. This Jalouri range is a noted haunt of red bear, and the shooting there is often reserved for the Great from Simla. Some of the best pheasant shooting in Kulu is obtainable along this range.

From Saraj the road enters Kulu by the Larji gorge, where the Beas narrows and flows deep and smooth under frowning cliffs that tower high above the water. This gorge will soon be the main entrance into Kulu. Plans have been maturing for many years to connect Kulu with the plains by a road from Larji through Mandi and Suket, and this project was materially advanced in 1923 by the construction of a great suspension bridge over the Beas at Pandoh, twelve miles above Mandi. My last march out from Kulu was along this road, which traverses the narrow gorge for miles, cut often in the living rock of the precipices. A few minor bridges need to be replaced and the road widened in places, and motor traffic will go straight through into Kulu, bringing innumerable changes in its train : at present motors cannot go beyond Pandoh stage.

The motor road will see the virtual closing of the two most usual routes into Kulu over the Bhubhu (9500 feet) and the Dulchi or Kandi Pass (6000 feet).

The Bhubhu road is closed in winter by the snow, and then all traffic is diverted to the Dulchi, which is always open. These passes are reached by the Kangra Valley cart-road, which leaves the railway at Pathankote, on a branch line from Amritsar. When I first visited Kulu, in 1910, there was a service of two-horse tongas, which plied along the Kangra Valley road for seventy miles, through Nurpur and Shahpur to Palumpur, with side roads to the ancient shrines of Kangra-Bhown and Jowalamukhi, and to the hill station of Dharmasala. Now the horse tongas have been replaced by a public motor service, which runs through Palumpur a farther ten miles to Baijnath, famous for its very ancient temple, one of the most sacred spots of India. From Baijnath the road passes into the territory of Mandi state; the first stage is Dhelu, and thence the Bhubhu is reached via Katarsin Jhatingri and Sil Badwani, and the Dulchi through Urla Drang and Kataula. At present, though the traveller may motor right up to Drang and beyond it, he has to march with mules to the Bhubhu from Katarsin, or to the Dulchi from Drang; but with the completion of the Larji-Mandi road he will motor right through to Sultanpur, the capital of Kulu, and avoid the crossing of any pass.

The Dulchi Pass is hardly worthy of the name, the ascent of the ridge being very gradual from both sides; the Bhubhu is more difficult, entailing a long and wearisome climb on both sides up a road which zigzags incessantly up the very steep sides of the ridge and passes through a little gully in the top. In point of actual exertion of climbing it is more difficult than either of the much higher Rhotang and Baralacha Passes of Lahul, but it is free from the troubles entailed by the cold and great elevation of these two ranges. Still I had an anxious crossing of the Bhubhu once early in December, when the duty devolved on me of escorting across in a litter a lady whose right

arm had been broken in two places by a fall from a bolting horse. The snow commenced before we were near the summit, and the journey was a strenuous race against time and the elements, which, fortunately, ended in our favour.

Sultanpur, the capital of Kulu, is situated at an elevation of 4000 feet at the junction of the Sarvari Valley and the road from the Bhubhu, with the Beas and the main road along the valley. Tradition relates that it was named after Sultan Chand, one of the rajas of the little kingdom of Lag, who was conquered, together with his brother, Raja Jog Chand, by Raja Jaggat Singh of the kingdom of Naggar. The original kingdom of Kulu had its capital at Nast-Juggutsukh, and from there the capital was transferred to Naggar. Raja Jaggat Singh, however, on annexing the kingdom of Lag, transferred his capital to Sultanpur about the year 1660, since when there has been no further change.

Raja Jaggat Singh built himself a palace and also a temple for the idol of Raghunathji, which he is said to have stolen from Oudh in expiation of a crime. He transferred the whole kingdom to the name of the god and remained himself as its vicegerent—a situation which explains the ceremonial between the Rais of Rupi, descendants of the old rajas of Kulu, and the god at the annual fair of Dasehra, which takes place at Sultanpur about the beginning of October every year.

There are virtually no remains of this ancient palace, but in its place has been erected a pretentious and garish structure, which has remained untenanted and unfinished since the death of the late Rai of Rupi, who virtually ruined himself on its erection. Close by is the temple of Raghunathji, and in the temple treasury are several ancient and valuable objects, well worthy of inspection.

The town of Sultanpur is composed of several

suburbs and contains about three thousand inhabitants. It suffered severely in the earthquake of 1905, which destroyed Dharamsala. The chief bazaars are separated from the Government buildings and the wide plain around which they are grouped by the Sarvari river, which flows in several channels through a wide and beautiful grove of giant alder-trees.

The stranger to Kulu arriving at the Dâk Bungalow, which is situated opposite to the Tehsil and police station, by the side of the open camping-grounds, has his attention immediately attracted by the curious wooden structure which stands on the camping-ground. This is the "Rath," or wooden car, of the god Raghunathji, which is used at the festival of the Dasehra, in September or October annually. The car is a ponderous edifice of roughly dressed wood ; on a platform supported by small solid wheels is erected an open shrine for the god, who sits under a square roof surmounted by a small spire.

In this car Raghunathji rides escorted by all the deotas or godlings of Kulu and Suraj, who come into Sultanpur by his orders, delivered as supreme lord of Kulu by the deed and gift of Raja Jagat Singh.

The deotas of Kulu are severely localised, and represent the old nature-spirits of the springs and rivers, with a more recent attribution to various Hindu deities ; they represent an important influence both of religion and of social intercourse in the lives of the people. The people have a sincere, though perhaps steadily weakening, belief in the efficacy of the deotas, to whom they turn in all times of trouble ; and the fairs held in the villages in honour of the local deotas and the ceremonial visits interchanged between the deotas, accompanied by their devotees, promote intercourse between the isolated villages of the tract. Great or small, the deotas all arrive at the Dasehra Fair to do homage to the imported Hindu

god of the Rajas, their overlord, and with them come half the people of Kulu and Saraj. It is the great occasion of the year, and for days music and dancing, gossip and trade, fill the wide camping-grounds of Sultanpur with incessant din and clamour, extending into the small hours of the nights.

On the first day of the fair Raghunathji is brought from his temple and placed in the car, which has been suitably decorated. The deotas are brought up and ranged around the car, and certain ceremonies are carried out, several of which betray their feudal origin. Then ropes are attached to the car and it is drawn, accompanied by the deotas and an enthusiastic crowd, to the tent where Raghunathji resides during the five days of the fair. For three days the deotas pay ceremonial visits and receive their admirers, with the accompaniment of incessant dancing and music. On the fifth and last day Raghunathji again ascends his car and after a detour to the bank of the Beas, where sacrifices are performed, is dragged back to the bank of the Sarvari river, whence he is carried back in a palanquin to his resting-place in the temple.

To those interested in curious and ancient customs the Dasehra Fair is well worth seeing, but they will be well advised to camp as far from the fair ground as possible if they desire occasional respite from dust and noise.

Up the Beas Valley, on the main roads from Sultanpur, there are rest-houses at Katraian and Naggar, on opposite sides of the river, and at Manali, which are all attractive places to visit ; while the beauty of the whole of this portion of the valley, with the great alder groves that frame the rushing Beas, alone repays the trouble of the journey.

Katraian is in many respects the pleasantest of the halts in the valley. The rest-house is built on the top of a high cliff overlooking the Beas, and there is

much level ground about it, which affords a welcome relief to the incessant climbing of the hills. This is a favourite halt for anglers, as good trout-fishing is obtainable in the vicinity. Brown trout were introduced into Kulu from Kashmir in 1909, and hatcheries and stock-ponds were built near Naggar, with the help of which the trout have been well established in the valley.

From Katraian the village of Naggar may be seen across the river up on the hill-side at an elevation of about 6000 feet. Here are situated the official residences of the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Kulu subdivision and of the Deputy Conservator of Forests of Kulu. The former lives in the bungalow, now purchased by the Punjab Government, which was built by Lieut.-General W. Osborn of the Indian Army, who settled in Kulu, and for many years was one of the most respected and beloved residents of the valley, doing good to all around him. His ashes repose beneath a deodar in the garden which he loved so well. Naggar Castle should not be missed ; it represents the old castle of the rajas when Naggar was the capital of Kulu, and much of the ancient work is still visible, though, as it has been used for many years as the court and residence of the Assistant Commissioners, the building has been largely altered. There is, however, still a good deal of the stone work bound with timber, which is typical of Kulu architecture, and to this is attributed the escape of the castle from the earthquake of 1905. The temples in the village contain several stone carvings of interest, and there is a patch of ground near the castle on which are set up various memorial stones to members of the royal family of Naggar.

Manali is one of the most beautiful spots in the valley ; the rest-house is built on level ground near the river and is surrounded by gigantic deodars of immense age, such as are seldom seen. Above it lie

the Manali orchards, the property of Captain Banon, which supply some of the best of the renowned Kulu fruit. In the vicinity are several objects of interest.

The ancient temple of Hirnam Devi at Dhungri is one of the few examples in Kulu of the hill temples with a pagoda-like roof. The temples of Kulu are divided into two kinds—the hill temples and the plains temples. The latter are built entirely of stone, of a tower-like conical formation, with a good deal of carving. They are few in number, and are due to the late introduction by the rajas into Kulu of the worship of Vishnu and Rama from the plains.

The hill temples, however, are connected with the indigenous worship of the Nags and Devis, spirits of the springs and rivers ; they are built in two forms—with either a pent roof of slates or shingles, or a pyramidal wooden roof, sometimes rising in tiers like the roof of a pagoda. These temples are built of a mixture of wood and stone, and the pent-house type is very common, the ordinary village temple of Kulu.

The Dhungri temple is very solidly constructed, with some elaborate carvings, and the pagoda roof rises in three tiers. The situation is dark and gloomy, surrounded by immense deodars that obstruct the light and render the scene a fitting one for the human sacrifices that were enacted here in years gone by. The remains of a rope hang down within the roof of the shrine, and from this the bodies of the victims are said to have been swung from side to side over the head of the great goddess, Hirnam Devi. Large boulders lie on the floor within the darkened shrine, and it is permissible to believe that they were left as altars on which the act of sacrifice was carried out.

There are hot springs on the left bank of the Beas near Manali at Bashist, and at Kalath on the right bank, but though revered by the people, and fenced in with stone-work as an act of piety, these waters appear to have no definite medicinal value.

The traveller who does not intend to continue his journey beyond Manali over the Rhotang into Lahul should ride out to Kothi and inspect the wonderful gorge of the Beas, which is described in Chapter I.

South of Sultanpur the valley of the Beas is less beautiful and interesting. It is hot in summer, as the elevation lies between 3000 and 4000 feet ; the land is fertile, and the greater width of the valley allows of more cultivation and plains' crops. It is significant also that here one meets with several species of plains birds—the fantail warbler, the common house crow, the Indian pipit, etc.—which have been isolated on this plain amongst the hill fauna. Bajaura is noted for the orchards and estate founded by Colonel Rennick and recently sold by him to a wealthy Hindu gentleman. Close by is the temple of Basheshar Mahadeo of Hát, one of the most ancient and famous shrines of Kulu, which is a protected monument, and has been carefully described in *The Archaeological Report of 1909-1910*.

At Bhuin, just above Bajaura, the Parbatti river joins the Beas. The lower stretches of this tributary valley are dull, and troublesome to march, but they are forgotten in the beauty of the road from Jari onwards. The right bank of the Parbatti is very precipitous, with hanging forests that recall the mountains of Bashehr. Beyond Manikaran the snowy ranges begin with a series of fantastic peaks that lend themselves to the view.

Manikaran, famous for its hot springs throughout the Hindu world, is an interesting place. Marching up the Parbatti Valley one comes suddenly on it round a corner. The village lies in a narrow glen, on the right bank of the river. Close behind the houses rises an immense rocky buttress of the Malana range, on the sides of which the village cattle find precarious grazing and a few houses cling, surrounded by bushes and slight terraces of cultivation. In the background



(Upper) A DEOTA'S GRANARY IN THE PARBATTI VALLEY

(Lower) A GADDI SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK



another mountain rises sheer from the river's bank ; the dull monotony of terraced fields clothes the base, but this soon yields to the soft dark colours of the blue pines. Above the pines is a zone of silver firs against the deep blue sky, concealing the weird peaks and their melting snows that were visible from farther down the valley ; but there is a hint of their presence in a patch of Alpine pasture, rocky bluff and snow that stretches beyond the line of firs. Opposite to Manikaran, across the river, a great gorge bisects the mass of mountain that screens the village from all but a few midday hours of sun : to the left of the gorge the precipices rise up, topped with straggling pines ; to the right there is a thick forest of blue pines.

The hot springs dominate the town. As one rounds the corner that brings it into view, clouds of steam ascend from the stony bank of the river, where the iron-stained water boils and bubbles in a small crater, and streams of it trickle down amongst the stones. Various channels of the water run through the village, diverted into different covered baths, and running open through the courtyards. The temperature of the springs varies from  $185^{\circ}$  to  $201.2^{\circ}$  F., and though there is widespread belief in its efficacy for various forms of illness, scientific analysis shows that its medicinal value is practically nil. However, the water has its practical uses, for in addition to the baths, which have a religious significance, the people wash their clothes in the channels and cook food in the boiling jets. The little brass lotas, covered with stones, are placed in numbers in the pools, and meals are cooked without trouble or expense.

There are three interesting temples at Manikaran. The first is of that Raghunathji whose fair of the Dasehra takes place at Sultanpur. Here also there is a small copy of the rath, or car, which rests on the high grassy bank of the river, that stretches like a

promenade before the temples. The second temple belongs to Ram Chandra and Shiva. The third, of Naina Devi, stands bare and tall, whitewashed, and much in the semblance of a large dwelling-house. The houses of the village are very picturesque, with their rough-hewn beams and carved woodwork and with their closed balconies; but the whole place is remarkable, even beyond the average village of Kulu, for dirt and squalor.

There are old silver mines near Manikaran, but the secret of smelting the metal has been lost. Tradition states that the receipt was destroyed by the Wazir of one of the Rajas of Kulu in revenge for some act of fancied slight.

An offshoot of the Parbatti Valley is the Malana glen, which lies in the angle between Manikaran and Naggar, and is reached from Naggar by the Chandra Kanni Pass. Owing to its remoteness and the association of the people with the great god, Deota Jamlu, the people of the glen have always occupied a position of semi-independence, divided from the people of Kulu. This attitude is so marked that even under British rule as late as 1883 a mountain-battery was detailed to march through the glen and spend some days in the village as a hint to the people to curb their insolence.

Deota Jamlu appears to be the spirit of the great peak of Deo Tibba (20,417 feet), and he is said to be the brother of the Gyéphang Peak and Deity in Lahul. Devi Prini, near the Humpta Pass, is their sister. Jamlu is said to have come originally from Spiti with his wife, Naroi, carrying a basket which contained a large number of deotas. At the summit of the Chandra Kanni Pass they opened the basket and the fierce wind immediately blew out all the deotas and scattered them to their present homes throughout Kulu and Saraj. Jamlu owns no allegiance to Raghunathji of Sultanpur, and himself boasts of tribute from the Emperor Akbar.

The story runs that Akbar was stricken with leprosy as his tax-gatherers took from a sadhu two pice, which had come from the treasury of Jamlu at Malana. These two pice were then found stuck together in Akbar's treasury, and the Emperor was told that his vicarious sin could not be expiated nor the disease cured until he in person returned the money to Malana and begged forgiveness of Deota Jamlu. It was pointed out, however, to the representatives of the god that so great and so sick a prince could hardly go in person to that distant valley, and the god very reasonably agreed to be satisfied if the pice were returned by deputy, together with a statue of Akbar in gold and of his horses and elephants in silver. This was done, and Deota Jamlu graciously withdrew the leprosy from the Emperor.

On every anniversary of the act of tribute the scene is re-enacted at Malana, and the images are brought out from the treasury and carried in procession to a stone that marks the spot where Jamlu received the Emperor's messengers. But now in course of time confusion has arisen, and Akbar, the suppliant, is worshipped at the ceremony rather than the god to whom he came. Strictly speaking, there is no temple of Jamlu at Malana ; the temple is that of his wife, Naroi, and its treasury is believed to contain the accumulations of ages—gold and silver statuettes, and furniture and money to the value of several lakhs of rupees.

## CHAPTER XVII

### BIRDS BY THE WAYSIDE IN LAHUL AND SPITI

WITH the passage of the Rhotang Pass and the descent into the barren mountains of Lahul the traveller finds that he has left behind the familiar birds of the Outer Himalayas. It is not merely a change from birds of the forest to birds of the open hill-side; the change is far deeper. The Rhotang range is a portion of the boundary between two zoogeographical regions—between the Himalayan sub-region of the Indian region and a portion of the Palæarctic region. The change is accentuated further by the great altitude of Lahul—over 10,000 feet—which means that the species breeding there are largely drawn from amongst the Alpine species of the Palæarctic fauna. Anyone familiar with the birds of the high Alps in Switzerland will feel at home amongst the birds of Lahul. Many of the species are actually the same, but where they differ the bird of one area is replaced in the other by a very similar equivalent.

Here I propose to give a very general description of the more familiar species met with in Lahul, sufficient to indicate the identity of birds which are certain to be observed along the line of march.

The game birds of Lahul have been treated of in a separate chapter and will therefore not be mentioned again here.

As he climbs the Rhotang, crossing from Kulu, the traveller can hardly fail to notice the choughs (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), which appear at an altitude of 8000 feet about Kothi, and feed on the grassy

slopes throughout the ascent of the Pass in flocks. Their large size and glossy black plumage at once betray their place in the crow family, and the curved red beak and red legs put identification beyond a doubt. The call is very musical and reminiscent of that of the jackdaw. These choughs may be found throughout Spiti and Lahul up to an altitude of at least 14,000 feet, but they are there greatly surpassed in numbers by the Alpine chough, which will not be seen until the crest of the Rhotang is crossed.

The Alpine chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) is easily the most characteristic bird of Lahul, distinguished from the common chough by its slightly smaller size, shorter yellow beak and duller legs. They occupy in Lahul somewhat the place of the house crow of the plains, both in their numbers and in their place as scavengers about the villages and camping-grounds. But the Alpine chough is far removed from the vulgarity of the crow in build and action, voice and demeanour. He is a dainty, mincing fellow, with a sort of shy boldness that brings him about the camp ready to leave at the slightest hint that his presence is unwelcome. His graceful movements and pleasant voice are always welcome, and I know no more charming sight than some of these choughs floating leisurely past in the air with wings extended to the breeze and the tail canting from side to side, often so widely spread that a gap appears between the central tail feathers. Some are almost always in sight in Lahul and Spiti, either feeding near at hand, hopping from boulder to boulder in the intervals of digging vigorously in the ground, or flying so high in the air as almost to be lost to sight. Single birds are accustomed to soar much in the manner of a kite, and at a sudden alarm a flock will rise in the air with all the whirling confusion of a flock of rooks. These choughs occupy a very warm place in my regard and memories of Lahul.

The jungle crow (*Corvus coronoides intermedius*) of Kulu is scarce in Lahul, but a few may be seen along the Chandra Valley. They follow the caravans over the Rhotang, and near the summit of the Pass I have seen a party settling on the packs of laden ponies, tearing holes in the bags of grain, and travelling with them.

That grand bird, the Tibetan raven (*Corvus corax tibetanus*), may be observed, usually in pairs, by the roadside in Lahul, but he is scarce until the Baralacha and the Kunzum ranges are passed. On the Lingti Plain I have observed ten of these birds at once searching over the site of a recently deserted Bhotia camp, together with a number of Alpine choughs and a few griffon vultures and lammergeiers. The great size and guttural voice preclude any mistake in the identity of this bird.

After the Alpine chough the most typical bird of the valleys of Lahul is the black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochrurus phoenicuroides*). This is a small bird of the size and shape of the English robin, and can be identified at once by its habit of shivering the tail. The male is largely black, with the under parts, from the breast downwards, deep chestnut ; the female and young males, who breed in this plumage, are a dull brown, with a bright rufous tail. The black redstart breeds throughout the countries of Lahul and Spiti in summer up to an altitude of 15,000 feet, being most abundant along the bottom of the valleys. The more barren and boulder-strewn the ground the more its requirements appear to be suited ; and the little bird perched on a big stone, uttering the trills and wheezy jingling of its song, or squeaking anxiously in the vicinity of its nest, is a familiar sight by the roadside. The delightfully delicate eggs, white or very pale greenish blue, are laid in a bulky nest well lined with hair and feathers, placed beneath a stone or in a wall. This bird is one of the common winter

birds of the plains of India, where he may be noted any day shivering his tail in the lower branches of some tree or bush.

The white-capped redstart (*Chimarrhornis leucocephalus*) never fails to attract attention, with his black and chestnut plumage, the black bar across the end of the chestnut tail, and the glistening white crown to the head. It is, however, seldom seen, except in the immediate neighbourhood of water, and is, more strictly speaking, a bird of the higher Himalayan zone—from 8000 to 10,000 feet—though many are seen in Lahul, and up to 16,000 feet. A somewhat similar bird is Güldenstart's redstart (*Phænicurus erythrogaster grandis*), which may be known at once by the white patch in the wing in addition to the white crown. This is a bird of the highest zone—about 14,000 to 16,000 feet—and is somewhat scarce.

The blue-headed redstart (*Adelura cæruleocephala*) is fairly common in the Juniper Forests of the Bhaga Valley. The male is black and white, with a blue crown to the head ; the female is brown, with rufous on the rump.

All travellers notice the grey-backed shrike (*Lanius schach tephronotus*), a typical butcher-bird, found along the Chandra and Bhaga valleys amongst the willow groves and brier patches, which hold his bulky nest, with its greenish white eggs, heavily zoned with spots round the broader end. A very similar bird, the rufous-backed shrike (*L. s. erythronotus*), breeds along the Kulu Valley and in the outer hills. The heavy bull head, with the black streak through the eye, and the long slender tail distinguish the shrike from any other bird in Lahul. In Spiti I have not seen it. It has the family habit of impaling bumble-bees and beetles on thorns in its larder to await their turn for consumption.

The finch family is strongly represented in Lahul and Spiti. Pride of place must be given to the lovely

little golden-fronted serin (*Serinus pusillus*), a small linnet-like bird of dark plumage, with a patch of flaming gold on the forehead. It is very common in pairs and flocks, which feed largely on the ground on the bare hill-sides, from 10,000 to 12,000 feet, and sometimes higher. The soft twittering note is a familiar sound, and on a sunny morning the Juniper Forest resounds with the song of these delightful little birds, whose nests and eggs, resembling those of a redpoll, are placed in the juniper-trees and brier bushes.

The Himalayan goldfinch (*Acanthis caniceps caniceps*) is another common songster of the willow groves and Juniper Forest, and may be found feeding, like the serins, on the stony hill-sides. It differs from the English bird in the absence of the black marking behind the red frontal patch.

In the Juniper Forests of Kyelang and Jispar the white-winged grosbeak (*Mycerobas carnipes carnipes*) is certain to be seen perched on the tips of the trees. It is a heavy blackish-looking bird, with yellowish under parts and a white patch in the wing, and its peculiar call at once attracts attention.

Lahul and Spiti are favoured with the possession of several species of rose-finches, so called from the delicate red and pink colours of the males. The females and young males are dull greyish brown birds, with dark streaks. The commonest is the scarlet grosbeak, or common rose-finch (*Carpodacus erythrinus roseatus*), which breeds in bushes in the valleys, where its short monotonous song is often heard, attracting attention by its loudness.

A larger species, the red-mantled rose-finch (*Carpodacus rhodochlamys grandis*), is found in the Juniper Forest beyond Kyelang; while two still larger species, the red-breasted rose-finch (*Pyrrhospiza punicea humii*) and Sovertzov's rose-finch (*Carpodacus sovortzovi*), are fairly common in the tracts beyond the Baralacha

and Kunzum ranges—over 12,000 feet—feeding on the stony hill-sides, and sometimes coming to the neighbourhood of the camping-grounds. The former is rather an ungainly, heavy bird, with a patch of deep dull crimson spreading over the forehead, throat and breast of the male. Sovertzov's rose-finches are a more slender, graceful bird, with spangles of a delicious pale pink on the head and breast of the male.

Sparrows are scarce in Lahul, but they are common about the faggot roofs of the Spiti houses. This is not the ordinary form of the plains, but a larger variety, known as *Passer domesticus parkini*.

Special interest attaches to the three species of mountain-finches of the genus *Montifringilla*, of which two will only be met with at the very highest elevations; all three are abundant where they occur.

The commonest is a dull brown bird, Stoliczka's mountain-finches (*M. nemoricola altaica*), which appears in winter in immense flocks in the Outer Himalayas down to an altitude of 3000 feet. These flocks may be seen in the Chandra Valley in the early summer flighting along the hill-sides in a restless, wavering manner, but as the summer progresses the birds divide and move up into the highest zone to breed. They are then particularly common in Spiti, and the pairs attract attention by the antics of the males, who extend their wings high above the head and wave them about by way of courting display. The nests of all the mountain-finches are very difficult to obtain, as they are hidden deep in holes under stones on the hill-sides: the eggs are white.

Adam's mountain-finches (*M. nivalis adamsi*) is a curious lark-like bird, with much white in the wings and tail; I have met it only in Spiti at altitudes of 13,000 feet, and there it is common.

The third species, Brandt's mountain-finches (*M. brandti hematopygia*), is found from 14,000 feet upwards, and is one of the very few species to be

encountered on the high ground—at 15,000 to 17,000 feet. It is a dark-looking bird, with a blackish head, that feeds along the ground amongst the stones and melting snow, flitting a little farther on when disturbed, as if reluctant to move. It will be found on the same ground as burhel. The call-note is a harsh “churr,” that is one of the few bird sounds to be heard at great altitudes.

One bunting is common in Lahul and Spiti along the valleys, up to about 12,000 feet, in the neighbourhood of cultivation and bushes. This is the meadow-bunting (*Emberiza cia stracheyi*), a grey and brown bird, with black and greyish white stripes on the head.

A very characteristic bird of the highest altitudes—from about 13,000 feet upwards—usually found in the same places as Brandt’s mountain-finch, is the horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris longirostris*) ; it may always be seen on the Rhotang and Baralacha passes. In colour it is greyish brown above and white below, with a conspicuous black gorget across the breast and black lines about the head. The name is due to two pointed tufts of black feathers, one above each eye, which can be erected at will.

It is not at all a shy bird, but may be observed at close quarters as it feeds amongst the stones or utters its insignificant song from the top of a boulder. Individuals come and feed on the camping-grounds. They are very pugnacious, fighting incessantly amongst themselves and sparring with the mountain-finches on their territory. The nests, with their long, yellowish brown eggs, one to three in number, are easily found amongst the stones on open ground.

Two other species of lark are found within our area, but they are only locally common. The Himalayan skylark (*Alauda arvensis guttata*) is very similar to the English bird, and breeds amongst the fields and grassy pastures of the Chandra Valley, where on a fine day

its song is uttered in the sky, recalling memories of green fields far away across the sea.

On the Lingti Plain and in Spiti Hume's short-toed lark (*Calandrella acutirostris acutirostris*) is common, a tiny brown lark, with white in the tail, that breeds amongst the wind-swept stones, wary and suspicious of any attempt to pry into its domestic economy.

Three kinds of wagtail are common along the valleys, breeding there in May and June. A black and white bird, confined to the stony banks of the river, is the same as the common wagtail of Kashmir, a close relative of the English pied wagtail; it is known as Hodgson's pied wagtail (*Motacilla alba alboides*). The other bird, also found along the rivers, is a grey and yellow species (*M. cinerea melanope*), a race of the grey wagtail, which is so familiar an object about the mountain streams of the British Isles. The third is a marsh bird, breeding about the tiny bogs on the mountain-sides, where the brilliant yellow head of the black-backed males tones in amongst the vivid kingcups that flower in the bogs, a vivid splash of colour amongst the rich green pastures. This is known as Hodgson's yellow-headed wagtail (*M. citreola calcaratus*).

The neighbouring genus of the pipits is poorly represented, but Hodgson's pipit (*Anthus roseatus*) is very common about the Rhotang Pass and similar grassy mountain slopes about 10,000 to 13,000 feet; it is a small streaked bird, with the breast of a delicate vinous tint, and may be known in all stages of plumage from other Indian pipits by the primrose-yellow under wing coverts. It feeds in pairs about the edges of the melting snow on the sodden ground, and the male frequently soars into the air uttering its sweet song, floating back to earth with out-stretched wings and tail.

Martins are common in the valleys up to about 14,000 feet, sweeping close along the hill-sides and

hanging suspended in the currents that blow about the cliffs and gorges. A plain brown species is the crag-martin (*Riparia rupestris*), and this is the most abundant. But the familiar house-martin (*Chelidon urbica*) and its close relative (*C. kaschmiriensis*) are fairly common, and the mud nests of all three kinds may be seen on the faces of the cliffs, usually in places far out of human reach. Another bird that hawks about the faces of the cliffs is the common swift (*Apus apus pekinensis*), and this often flies in flocks low over the cultivation ; it is merely a race of the English bird.

But a few birds remain to be mentioned. Dippers are met with here and there about the rivers and larger streams, flying swiftly along the water with their curious shrill call, or bobbing and turning on the stones by the water's edge. They will be recognised at once—fat, stumpy birds—by those who know the English dipper, or water-ousel ; and the white-breasted species in Spiti and at the Chandra Lake is merely a race (*Cinclus cinclus caschmiriensis*) of this English bird. At lower levels in Lahul is found the brown dipper (*C. pallasii tenuirostris*), a sombre chocolate-coloured bird, which is common on all the larger streams, from Mandi and Kangra upwards.

The missel-thrush (*Turdus viscivorus bonapartei*) will need no introduction when he is seen and heard amongst the juniper-trees, and the streaked laughing thrush (*Trochalopteron lineatum griseicentior*) will be familiar to all who know the hill stations of the Western Himalayas and the dark brown bird that shuffles along the ground in their gardens, threading in and out of the bushes with a querulous and incessant chatter.

Birds of prey are not numerous, but the sparrow-hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) and the kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) will occasionally be seen along the valleys. The Himalayan griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*)

and the lammergeier (*Gypaëtus barbatus*) attract attention by their huge size, but neither bird is as numerous as in the Outer Himalayas. To the novice the short square tail and broad rounded wings of the griffon are the readiest means of distinguishing it from the lammergeier, whose long pointed wings and wedge-shaped tail can be recognised at any distance.

This list of the birds of Lahul might be extended by the inclusion of a number of other species, but they are too scarce or too insignificant in appearance to interest any but the professed ornithologist ; and he will read elsewhere than in this chapter to gain information on the birds of Lahul.

Attention must, however, be drawn to a most curious and interesting species that breeds here and there on the shingle beds of the rivers. The ibis-bill (*Ibidorhynchus struthersi*) is a thickly built bird, much of the shape and size of the whimbrel, with a long curved bill of a blood-red colour ; a dark facial mask and a broad black gorget relieve a plumage composed chiefly of bluish grey and white. The exact affinities have not been ascertained, but it appears to be related to the curlew and whimbrel, and in flight along the river banks it reminded me very much of an oyster-catcher. It is confined to the high lands of Central Asia, from Turkestan to China.



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